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The Popular Magazine

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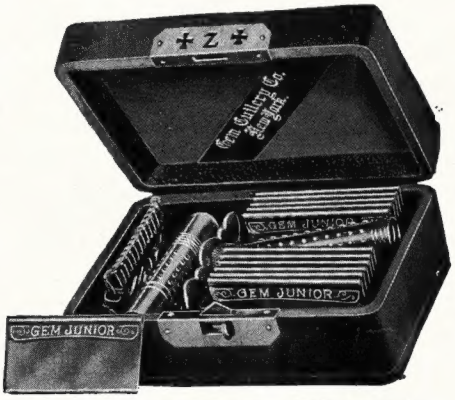

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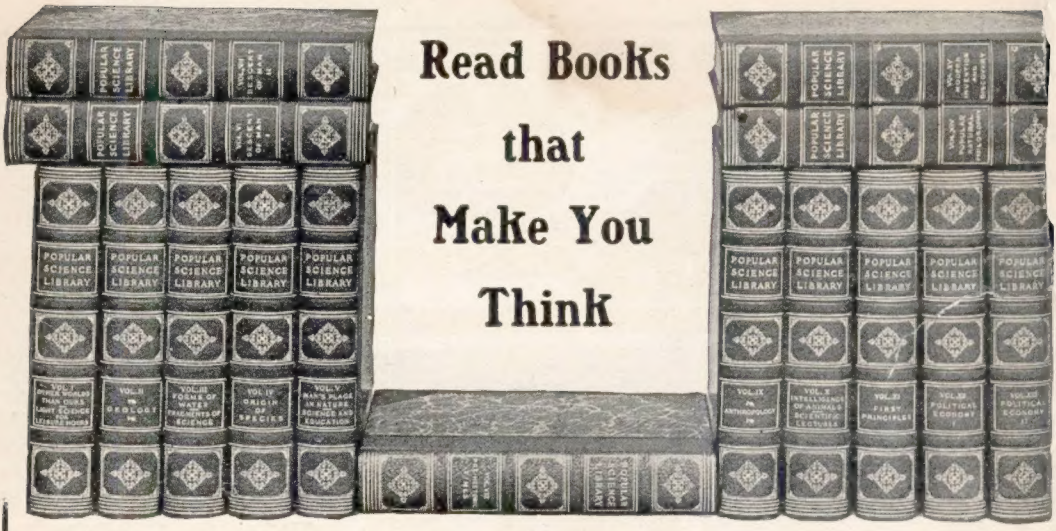

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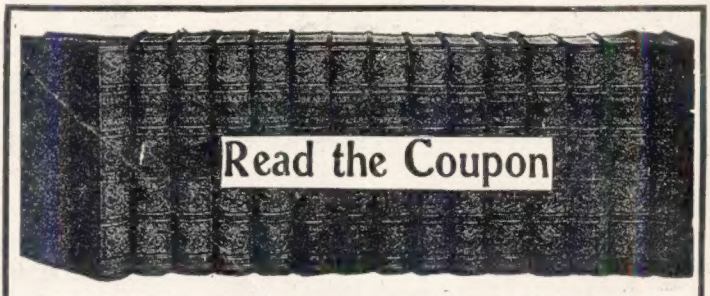

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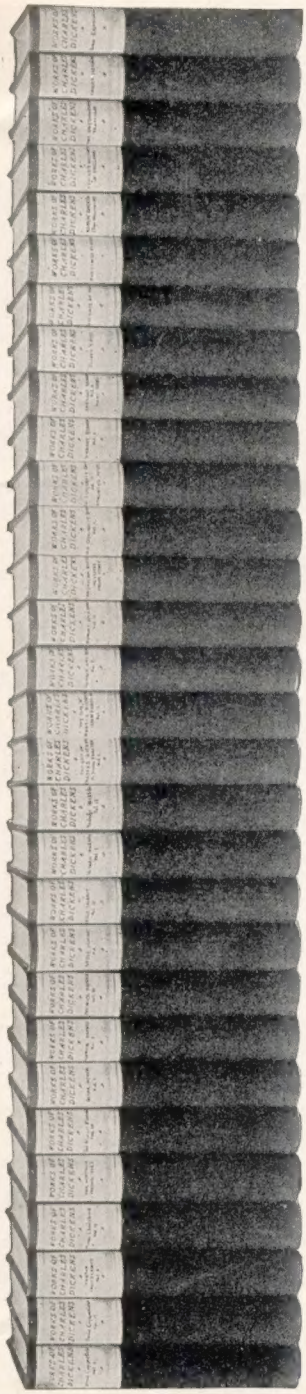

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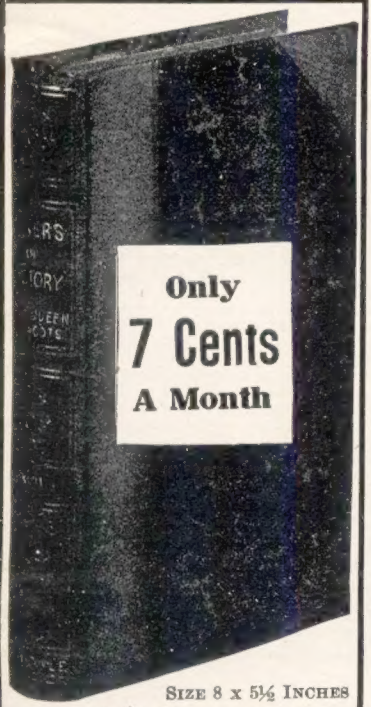

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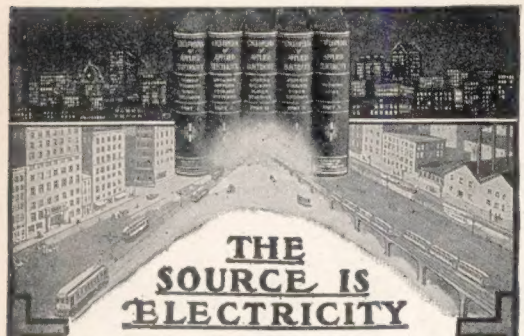

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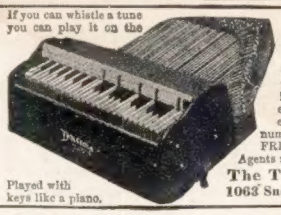

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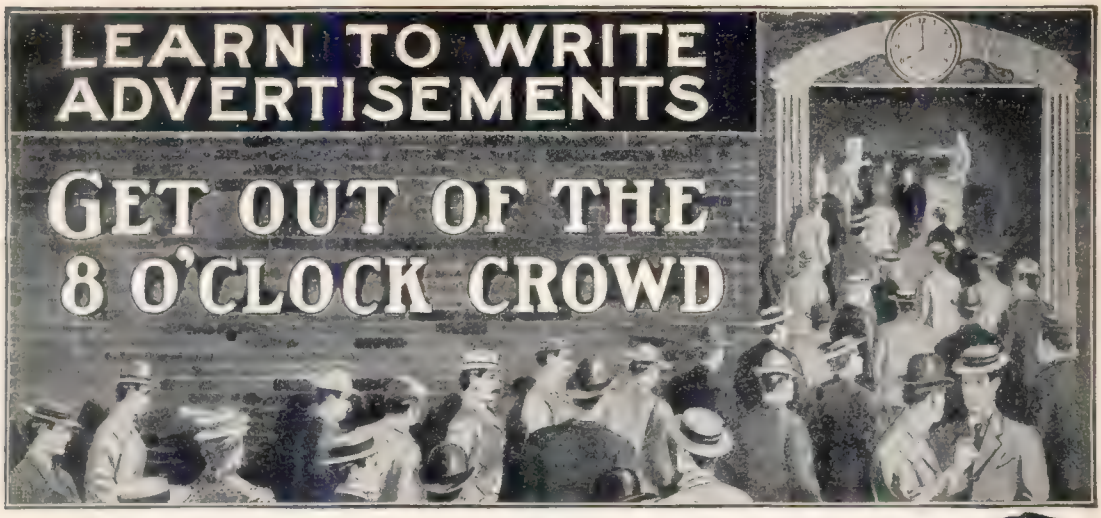
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VOLUME IX NUMBER 4

The Popular Magazine

OCTOBER 1907

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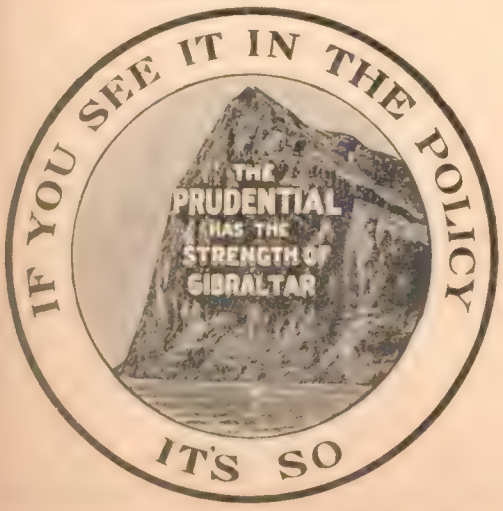

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THE POPULAR MAGAZINE

VOL. IX. OCTOBER, 1907. No. 4.

Raw Gold

By Bertrand W. Sinclair

Author of "A Red, Red Trail," "The Lair of the Sun-dogs," "Sound-of-many-guns," Etc.

If you turn back your "Popular" file to the April number of this year you will find a little story called "A Red, Red Trail." We had a great many letters commending that story very highly, and we concurred in the general acclaim. It was an excellent short story. This month we give you a much longer story by Mr. Sinclair in which you will find the same strong local color that made "A Red, Red Trail" so real. It is a story of the great Northwest where strange things are done under cover of the whispering cottonwoods.

(*A Complete Novel*)

CHAPTER I.

BIRDS OF PREY.

I EXPECT nearly everybody between the Arctic Circle and the Isthmus of Panama has heard, more or less, of the Northwest Mounted Police. They're changing with the years, like everything else in this one-time buffalo country; but when Canada shipped them West, to keep law and order in a territory that was a city of refuge for a lot of tough people who had played their string out south of the line, they were, as one old codger said about Indians as scalp-lifters, eminently fitted for the task. They were a queer-looking lot to me, with their tight-fitting, scarlet jackets and yellow-striped breeches, and funny little round caps set on one side of their heads, and held there by a strap that ran around the chin. They got wise after they'd been on the plains a year or two, and took to wearing Stetson hats; but I often wondered how many of them got sunstroke before they did.

It doesn't seem long ago, but it was in '74 that they filed down the gangway of that Missouri River boat at Benton, and walked as straight and stiff as if every mother's son of them had a ramrod under his tunic, across a rickety old wharf that was groaning under the weight of a king's ransom in baled buffalo hides. They marched overland from Benton to the Cypress Hills; and Fort Walsh was headquarters for the Northwest when they got located.

About two years after that, the La-Père outfit sent me to Fort Walsh in charge of a bunch of saddle-horses the M. P. quartermaster had said he'd buy if they were good. I turned them over, and started back with over ten thousand dollars—the sale money—and the first day out I had a chance to observe how

high the "Riders of the Plains" stacked up when they undertook to keep the peace and enforce the laws.

We'd pulled into a buffalo-hunter's camp for dinner, myself and two other horse-wranglers; and first thing they did was to spring a keg of whisky on us. Now, the whole Northwest was under prohibition law for several years. No booze of any description was supposed to be sold in the Territories. If you got so thirsty you couldn't stand it any longer, you could petition the lieutenant-governor for what they called a "permit"—which same granted you leave and license to have in your possession one gallon of whisky. If you were a person of irreproachable character, and your humble petition reached his excellency when he was amiably disposed, you might, in the course of a few weeks, get the desired permission—but anyway you figured it whisky was hard to get, and when you got it it came mighty high.

That sort of thing, naturally, didn't appeal to most of the high-stomached children of fortune who ranged up and down the Territories—being nearly all Americans, and born with the notion that it is a man's incontestable right to drink whatever he pleases whenever he pleases; consequently, every mother's son of them who knew how, and could rustle a "worm," took up his post in a deep coulée, and started a small-sized distillery. Some of them got rich at it, too, which wasn't odd when you consider that everybody had a big thirst and plenty of money. I've seen barrels of moonshine whisky, so new and rank that two drinks of it would make a jack-rabbit spit in a bulldog's face, sold on the quiet for six and seven dollars a quart—and a twenty-dollar gold piece was short money for a gallon.

Of course, all this was strictly against the peace and dignity of the crown; and the red-coat boys rode the high divides with their eagle eye peeled for anybody that looked like a whisky-runner. And if they located any one peddling the contraband, the gentleman was due to have his outfit confiscated, and get a chance to ponder the error of his ways in the seclusion of an M. P. guard-house, if he didn't make an exceedingly fast getaway.

We all took a drink when these buffalo-hunters produced the "redeye." Piegan Smith set the keg on the ground handy to the fire, where everybody could help himself when he took the notion; and I lay down by a wagon-wheel while dinner was being cooked. After a lot of long, hard days in the saddle it was great to lie there in the shade, with a cool breeze to fan your face; and before long I was headed for the dreamland pastures. I'd just dozed off when somebody gave an angry yelp, and I raised up on one elbow to see what had happened.

Most of the hunters were bunched on one side of the fire, and they were looking pretty sour at a thin, trim-looking Mounted Policeman, who was standing with his back to me, holding the whisky-keg up to his nose. A little way off stood his horse, bridle-reins dragging and his ears pricked up, as if he, too, could smell the whisky. The trooper sniffed a second, and set the keg down.

"Gentlemen," he asked, in a soft little voice that had a mighty familiar ring to me, "have you a permit to have liquors in your possession?"

Nobody said a word. There really wasn't anything they could say. He had them dead to rights, for it was smuggled whisky, and they knew that policeman was simply asking as a matter of form, and that his next move would be to empty the refreshments on the ground; if they got rusty about it, he *might* haze the whole bunch of us into Fort Walsh—and that meant each of us contributing a big, fat fine to the queen's exchequer.

"You know the law," he went on, in the same kid voice. "Where is your authority to have this stuff?"

If old Piegan Smith hadn't sampled the contents of that cask so industriously, he would never have made a break. For a hot-tempered pilgrim he had good judgment, which a man needed if he wanted to live his allotted span in the vicinity of the forty-ninth parallel in

those troubled days. But he'd put enough of the fiery stuff under his belt to make him touchy as a parlor-match; and when the trooper, getting no answer, flipped the keg over with his foot, and the whisky trickled out among the grass-roots, Piegan forgot that he was in an alien land, where the law is upheld to the last, least letter, and the arm of it is long and unrelenting.

"Here's my authority, yuh blasted runt," he yelled, and jerked his six-shooter to a level with the policeman's breast. "Back off from that keg, or I'll hang your hide to dry on my wagon-wheel in a holy minute!"

The policeman's shoulders stiffened, and he put one foot on the keg. From where I was lying I could see the fingers of his left hand shut tight over his thumb, pressing till the cords in the back of his hand stood out in little ridges.

I'd seen *that* before, and I knew that I wasn't mistaken in the man, though his face was turned from me; and I likewise knew that old Piegan Smith was nearer kingdom come than he'd been for many a day, if he did have the drop on the man with the scarlet jacket. He was holding his pistol on a double back-action, rapid-fire gun-fighter; and only the fact that Piegan was half-drunk, and the other performing an impersonal duty, was all that prevented the opening of a large-sized package of trouble.

While on the surface Smith had all the best of it, he needed that advantage, and more, to put himself on an even footing with Gordon MacRae in a mix-up of that sort; MacRae was the type of man that can keep his feet and burn powder after you've planted enough lead in his system to sink him in swimming water.

There was a half-minute of nasty silence. Smith stood glowering, his pistol up, and at full cock. His foot still on the keg, the policeman faced the frowning gun, motionless, waiting. The keg was almost empty when the trooper spoke again.

"Don't be a fool, Smith," he quietly said. "You can't buck the whole force, you know, even if you did get the best of me. Put up your gun."

Piegan heard him, all right, but his pistol never wavered. His mouth was pinched close; so tight the scrubby beard on his chin stood straight out in front; his chest was heaving, and the angry blood stood darkly red under his tanned cheeks. Altogether, he looked as if his trigger-finger might crook without warning. It was one of those long moments that makes a fellow draw his breath sharp when he thinks about it afterward.

If any one had made an unexpected move just then, there would have been sudden death in that camp. And, while the lot of us sat and stood about, not daring to move or speak lest the wrathful old cuss squinting down the gun-barrel *would* shoot, the policeman took his foot off the empty cause of the disturbance, and deliberately turning his back on Piegan's leveled six-shooter, walked over to his horse.

Smith lowered his gun with frank astonishment. "The nerve uh the darned—— Say! don't go off mad," he yelled, his anger evaporating before his admiration for sheer pluck. "Yuh spoiled our whisky—but, then, I guess yuh don't know any better. No hard feelin's, anyway. Stop an' eat with us."

The policeman withdrew his foot from the stirrup, and smiled at Piegan Smith; and Piegan, to show that his intentions were good, unbuckled his cartridge-belt, and threw it and the six-shooter on the ground. "I've plumb lost all desire for trouble," he grunted. "I guess I was a little bit hasty, anyhow."

"I call you," the policeman said, and, stripping saddle and bridle from his sweaty horse, turned him loose to graze.

"Hello, Mac!" I hailed, as he walked up to the fire. He glanced at me with vastly more concern than he'd betrayed under the muzzle of Piegan's gun.

"Old Sarge, or I'm a sinner!" he exclaimed.

"You sure are," I retorted, as we shook hands.

He sat down beside me, and began

to roll a cigarette. Not a very demonstrative greeting, perhaps, for two old *companeros* who'd grown up together and come West full of high spirits and youthful enthusiasm to joust with fortune among the chaparral and hair-lifting Comanches of the Southwest. That was MacRae's style; he never slopped over, no matter how he felt. His way was always an even tenor. His looks gave no hint of the real man under the surface; you'd never have guessed what possibilities lay behind that immobile face, with its heavy-lashed, hazel eyes, and plain, thin-lipped mouth, that tilted up just a bit at the corners.

Chance had parted us in the Texas Panhandle, sending me North and him to Kansas, five years before; it's a far cry from punching cows in the Southwest to wearing the queen's colors and keeping peace along the border-line; but I knew he'd tell me the why of it in his own good time, if he meant that I should know. When he'd made his cigarette and lighted it, he began to talk, and we ranged from Amarillo to the Canada line in the few minutes it took the medley of cooks to prepare coffee and hot biscuit and broiled buffalo steak.

When we'd eaten, one of the hunters rounded up the horses, and we caught our nags and saddled up—that ten thousand of another man's money was a responsibility I wanted to be rid of with the least possible delay. Also MacRae, I'd discovered, had prospered in the service, and was now a sergeant in charge of Pend d'Oreille,* a post lying twenty-five miles to the south of us—a long afternoon's ride, but we were glad of each other's company, and the shelter of the post would be welcome in that semi-hostile country.

There were no road-agents to speak of, for no sums of money large enough to tempt gentry of that ilk passed over those isolated trails; but here and there stray parties of Stonies and Blackfeet, young bucks in war-paint and breechclout, hot on the trail of their first medicine, skulked warily from ridge to ridge, keeping in touch with the drifting buffalo herds, and alert for a chance to ambush straggling white men and lift their hair.

Dark came down on the four of us as we topped Manyberries Ridge, and ten miles of rolling prairie still lay between us and Pend d'Oreille. We jogged along easily, saving our horses' strength for what emergency might arise in the long journey to the south. A pall of clouds blew out of the west, hiding the stars, and the dark wrapped us like a black sea-mist. In the sultry, velvet gloom no sounds arose but the night-song of frogs in the upland sloughs, and the hollow clank of the steel bits keeping time to the creak of saddle-leather.

Half-way down the abrupt ridge, MacRae and I, riding a few yards in the lead of the other two, pulled up to make a cigarette on the brink of a straight-walled coulée that we could sense but not see.

As I waited for MacRae to strike a match, my eyes sought to pierce the unnatural blackness that spread all about us; and, while my gaze was for an instant bent on the night-enveloped cañon, a red tongue of flame flashed out for a moment in the inky shadow below. MacRae saw it, and held the match.

"Must be somebody camped down there," I hazarded.

"A camp-fire wouldn't flash like that, Sarge," he answered thoughtfully. "At least not an ordinary one. There are a few people in this country, you know, who manifest a very retiring disposition at times. That's either a blind fire or a signal. Let's wait a minute."

We stood staring down; a minute that lengthened to five; then MacRae broke off in the middle of a sentence as the flare leaped up, flickered an instant, and was blotted out again. I could have sworn I heard a cry of pain.

"Hear that?" one of the boys asked eagerly. "Somebody hollered."

"There's some sort of funny business going on down there," MacRae said, in a low tone. "I'm going to see what it is. You fellows better stay here."

"Not on your life," I protested, and

*Pon-der-ay. Fr. Means "earring."

the boys seconded me. "You might run into 'most any kind of formation—and I'm kind of curious about this signal business myself."

So near to the post it was that MacRae knew the very feel of the ground underfoot. He led us a hundred yards along the bank, and stopped again.

"Have to lead your horses," he warned. "It's a devil of a scramble from here to the bottom."

We dismounted, and found that MacRae hadn't exaggerated the evil qualities of that descent. If there had been boulders on that hillside, the noise of our coming would have alarmed a deaf man, but the soft dirt and slippery grass gave out no sound, though we slid and tumbled and dug in our heels for a foothold till the sweat streamed down our cheeks.

At the bottom we mounted again, and followed MacRae in a cautious file around clumps of willow and rustling quaking-asp, to the place where the blaze should have shown. But no crackling fire rose up to greet us; the coulée bottom lay more dark and silent, if that were possible, than the gloomy hills above. Perplexed, MacRae halted, and each of us strained his eyes and ears to catch some sight or sound of life in that black, ghostly quiet. We might have thought our senses had played us a trick, that the flame we'd seen was an imaginary thing—but for the rank, unmistakable odor of burned wood; a smell no man bred in a land of camp-fires can mistake.

After a bit Mac caught a stronger whiff of the smoke, and circled a clump of brush, to come slap upon the banked fire barely visible at short range under its covering of earth. A dim bulk lay beside it; and, leaning over in our saddles, the faint glow of the coals revealed a man's body, half-naked, and—oh, well, such things are so utterly devilish you wouldn't credit it. It's bad enough for savages; but I never could understand how any white man could take a leaf out of the Indian's torture-book.

The fire had been heaped over with clay—to screen it from prying eyes while the good work went on. We got off our horses and stooped over the man. Mac swore under his breath when he knelt down and looked closely; then he jumped to his feet and kicked the clay covering from the smoldering embers—and, as the sparks and the bright glow of it pierced the darkness, a harsh voice behind us grated: "Hands up!"

We swung round to behold two masked faces regarding us from behind steadily held Winchesters.

The very suddenness of the hold-up made it a complete success. Apart, and moving, we might have scattered in the brush like young quail, and given the gentlemen a hard run for the money. But we were bunched together, staring at the pitiful figure at our feet, when MacRae unmasked the fire, and the flare of it surrounded us with a yellow nimbus that made us fair marks for a gun. With the dazzling light in our eyes, and those ugly-looking customers at the business-end of the guns, it would have been out and out suicide to reach for a six-shooter. We were fairly caught, and there was nothing to do but elevate our digits and paw the air as commanded.

It took one of those Western Turpins about a minute to relieve us of our artillery and lead our horses out of sight. I had hopes that they merely wanted our horses, and weren't onto the money I carried, but my hopes were shattered instanter, for he was back in a moment, and the man behind the gun indicated me with a wave of his Winchester.

"That long, stoop-shouldered gazabo," he growled, "has the stuff!"

There was half a second when I had a wild notion of getting fractious. A fellow hates to make a regular bungle of the first decent trust he's had in a long time; but I was in a tight place, and it didn't take me long to decide that it was a heap better all round to be robbed alive than dead—there might be a chance to square things later.

The silent partner knew right where to look, which was another thing I didn't sabe. He reached down inside my shirt with a none too gentle hand,

and relieved me of the belt that held the money. Then the two of them backed up and faded away into the gloom.

CHAPTER II.

A TALE HALF-TOLD.

When they were gone we drew a long breath, and let our hands down to a natural level.

"We appear to be up against it," I observed. "The LaPère outfit is shy ten thousand dollars—and we're afoot, minus everything but cigarette material. It's a wonder they didn't take that, too. A mighty good stroke of business, all right," I finished, feeling pretty sore. When it was too late, I could think of a dozen ways we might have escaped getting stuck up.

"I got you into it, too," MacRae muttered. "But don't get excited and run on the rope this early in the game, Sarge; you'll only throw yourself. Brace up. We've been in worse holes before." Never a word of what it might mean to him; never even hinted that the high moguls at Fort Walsh were more than likely to break him for letting such lawless customers slip through his fingers in his own district. A Mounted Policeman is supposed to be a winner every time; and the only way he can escape censure for getting the worst of it is to be brought in feet first.

He motioned to the poor devil lying by the fire.

"Take a good look at him, Sarge," he went on. "It doesn't seem as if I could be mistaken; I've a pretty good memory for faces. But—go ahead; see if you know him."

I bent over the man, peering closely at his features; dropped on one knee, and turned his face toward the firelight to make sure.

"Why, it's old Hans Rutter," I cried, and shrank back, a mite startled. His eyes had opened, showing mostly the whites, in a creepy sort of way, and closed again. "He's not dead, Mac!"

"One of you fellows get some water," MacRae commanded. He squatted beside me, lifting Rutter's head. I peeled off my coat and spread it over the marred limbs. In a minute Bruce was back from the creek that whimpered just beyond the willow patch with his hat full of water. He held it so that I could dip in my hand and sprinkle Rutter's face. After a little there was a dry rattling in his throat, he moved his head slightly, and looked up at us, a light of recognition in his eyes.

"A—drink," he whispered huskily.

Mac propped him up so that he could sip from the hat-brim. He came near going off again, but rallied, and after a second or two his lips framed a question.

"Did yuh—get 'em?"

I shook my head. "You might say that they got us," I blurted out.

"Who was it, Hans?" MacRae questioned eagerly. "Tell us all you can. We'll make them sweat blood for this. Did you know them?"

"No," Rutter spoke, with a great effort; short, jerky utterances, born of pain and weakness and numbered moments. "White men—dressed like—Injuns—first; got us at the—the Stone. Hank an' me—yuh know Hank—Rowan. You'll find Hank—in the timber—Stony Crossin'. I tried—to make the post—Walsh. Two of 'em—masked. Tried to make me tell 'em—tell 'em—where Hank cached the dust. I'm—oh, God, God! A—ah! I—I'm done. The dust—it's——" The gnarled hands shut up into clenched fists, and the feeble voice trailed off in an agonized moan.

I laved his pain-twisted face with the cool water, and let a little of it trickle into his open mouth. He gasped a few times, gathering himself together, and went on slowly:

"Lyn—was to be at Walsh. They were after us—a long time. There's a good—stake. Get it—for her. It's cached under—under the stone—yuh know — Writin'-Stone. Three sacks. That's what they—wanted. You'll—you'll—on the rock above—marked—gold—raw gold—that's it—gold—raw gold—on the rock—raw gold—Mac—I want—I want——"

The tense muscles relaxed in the game old Dutchman's neck, his head fell back limp, and the rest of his message went with him across the great divide.

"There's a lot back of this I don't understand," MacRae said slowly, more to himself than to the rest of us. "Why should these two old cowmen be here in this country, tangled up with buried gold-dust, and hunted down like wild beasts for the sake of it? Old Hans was in his right mind, or he wouldn't have known us, and if he was right, Hank Rowan has been murdered, too. If Lyn is at Walsh, she may know; but I'll swear I can't see through it."

"If Lyn is at Fort Walsh," I asserted stoutly, "she kept under cover while I was there, and that isn't her style. I was there three days, and I wasn't in the background, by any means; and Lyn's the kind of girl that would sure let a friend know it if she was around; especially this far from home. Another thing, how did those two fellows know I had that money, and where I carried it?"

It was a stubborn riddle for us; and our surroundings at that particular moment weren't the most favorable to coherent thought or plausible theory building. When a man's robbed and set afoot in the heart of an unpeopled waste, with a dead man and a dying fire for company, his nerves are apt to get a little bit on edge. Things that wouldn't tax your fortitude in daylight look like the works of the devil when you have to face them in the black hours of the night. If it should ever be my lot to take the long trail at short notice, I hope it will be under a blue sky and a blazing sun. It was hard to be philosophic, or even decently calm, standing there in the sickly glow of the fading coals, with old Hans mutely reminding us that life is a tenuous thread, easily snipped.

It occurred to me that our masked friends could easily sneak up and pot us, if, as an afterthought, they decided to do a real workmanlike job. Doubt it? Wasn't the dead man at our feet convincing proof of their capacity for devilishness? Read the history of these days along the line—you'll turn some red pages. There were no half-way measures in the code of a "bad man" then; the pair who held us up would have taken our lives as nonchalantly as they relieved us of our material possessions had we been in the least degree troublesome.

I hinted my fears to MacRae, and, when he agreed that it was a possible contingency, we filed out of the treacherous light and squatted in the edge of a quaking-asp grove, where we couldn't be seen, and where a coyote, much less a man, couldn't steal up on us without the crackle of dry brush betraying him.

"What do you intend to do, Sarge?" MacRae whispered to me, when we got fairly settled. "Go on to Benton, or stay here on the chance of getting even next deal?"

"This one isn't over yet," I growled back. "I'm whipsawed this time, but I'm still in the game, and when it comes to calling the last turn, I'll be there with a stack of blues. No, I won't go back to Benton while somebody else is packing LaPère's money. If I can rustle horses, I'll send these two boys on home, and write to the old man how the play came up. If those jaspers flash any part of that roll in the Territories before the first snow falls, I'll get them. I've got to get them, to square myself."

"It's what I'd do," he answered. "If they're like the average run of men that turn a trick of that kind, they'll give themselves away if you let them alone. The big bills will be their downfall if they undertake to spend them in this country—and ten thousand dollars isn't a big enough stake to pull out with. I'm sure glad you're going to stay here and see the thing through. It's an ugly mess all round, and if old Hans told us true, it'll be worse before it's cleaned up. If there's a stake cached around Writing-on-the-Stone, these land-pirates will camp mighty close on the trail of anybody that goes looking for it. And it won't be any Sunday-school picnic dealing with them, either—they've showed a strong hand there." He motioned to the place where Rutter lay.

"The best thing for us to do," he continued, after a little, "is to pull out right now and hoof it to Pend d'Oreille. We have two extra horses there, and we can be moving bright and early in the morning. I'll have to report in person at Walsh, but before I do, we must go to Stony Crossing and look for Hank Rowan. If we find him as Hans said, you can gamble that trouble has camped in our dooryard for a lengthy stay. And it might be a good idea for you to give your men a gentle hint to keep their mouths shut about this thing—all of it. There's about one chance in a million of our finding that gold, even if it's there, and it won't help us or the rest of the force to catch the men who held us up, if everybody on both sides of the line gets to talking about it."

"I'll tell them," I replied. "I guess you have the right idea. It's a cinch that if we land the men that set us afoot, we'll have the cold-blooded whelps that put Hans Rutter's light out. But I don't sabe, Mac, why those old-timers should be mixed up in a deal of this kind. Their cattle and range on the Canadian had a gold-mine beat to death for money-making."

"I don't know, either. You see"—MacRae spoke in a low, even tone, as matter-of-fact as if he were speaking of the spring round-up—"that fall when I came back from Kansas, Lyn and I fell out—figured we'd been mistaken in our feelings, and called it off. I quit the outfit, of course. Went to Colorado, and up here next spring. Three years ago, just after I joined the Police, a bull-whacker on the Whoop-up trail told me that Hank shot another cowman in Fort Worth, and dumped a barrel of money getting clear. That, and a range war that grew out of the killing, and an outbreak of the tick-fever, just about broke them. This fellow said an Ogalalla trail-boss told him about it. I didn't believe much of it at the time; but I'm beginning to think he had it right. There's been a lot of placer-mining away to the north of here the last three or four years. They might have drifted up there, and struck it good and plenty. Rutter made his start in the cow business off a placer in California, you know."

"First I heard of their going broke," I said. "But I haven't seen a man from the Panhandle in two years. I've been in the Judith Basin, and the trail herds haven't begun to come in there yet. I'm framing up my think-works so I won't be surprised at anything I see or hear after to-night, though. I reckon we'd better start, hadn't we?"

Mac led the way. The four of us slipped through the brushy bottom as silently as men unaccustomed to walking might go, leaving Rutter's body undisturbed by the blackening fire. In the morning we would come back and bury him, but for that night—well, he was dead, beyond any man's power to aid or injure, and you must not think hardly of us that we left him lying alone in the dark.

We stumbled along, close up, for the thick-piled clouds still hung above, and three yards apart we were invisible to each other. My footsteps became mechanical; and though I was, in a way, acutely conscious of every step, and the necessity for stealthy going, one part of my mind was busy turning over the past, and guessing haphazard at the future. Out of the thought-jumble it came to me that the last sentence MacRae had spoken to me in the South was a message to Lyn Rowan—a message that earned me a sunny smile when I delivered it at the home ranch on the Canadian. And so they had quarreled, and "called it off."

Well, that's an example of the average human's cussedness. Lyn could be just as haughty and imperious as she was sweet and gracious, which was natural enough, seeing she'd ruled a cattle-king and all his sunburned range-riders since she was big enough to toddle alone; and Gordon MacRae wasn't the sort of man who would come to heel at any woman's bidding. Oh, I could sabe how it happened, all right. Each of them was chuck full of that dubious sort of pride that has busted up more than one love *fiesta*.

Three hundred yards or more down the coulée I tripped over a fallen cot-

tonwood, and drove the point of a projecting limb clean through the upper of my boot and into the fleshy part of my leg—not a disabling wound, but one that lacked nothing in the way of pain. The others stopped while I pulled out the snag which had broken off the trunk; and while I was at it a clattering noise uprose near-by.

Ever hear a horse shake himself, like a water-spaniel fresh from a dip, when he's been tied for hours in one place, with the dead weight of a heavy stock-saddle on his back? There's a little by-play of grunting and clearing of nostrils, then the rattle and slap of skirts and strings, and stirrup-leathers—you never forget the sound of it, if you've ever slept in a round-up camp, with a dozen restless night-horses saddled and tied to a wagon twenty feet from your bed. But it made me jump, welling up out of the dark so unexpectedly and so near.

"Saddle-horse—tied," Mac tersely commented. We squatted down in the long grass and buckbrush, listening; and a moment later a horse snorted distinctly, followed by the steady beat of an impatient forefoot.

"Over there," I said; "and there's more than one. Let's investigate this. And we'd better not separate."

Fifty yards to the left we struck a cottonwood grove, and in the very edge of it loomed up the vague outline of a horse—when we were almost within reaching distance of him. I ran my hand over the saddle, and knew it instantly for Bruce Haggin's rig. A minute's quiet prowling revealed our full quota of live stock, even to the pack-horse that bore our bed and grub, tied hard and fast to separate trees. Also our six-shooters reposed in their scabbards, the four belts hooked over the horn of MacRae's saddle.

Maybe it didn't feel all right to be on the hurricane-deck of a good horse once more! Whenever I have to walk a mile or two, I can always see where a horse-thief gets into the habit. We broke out of that bottom on a high lope, all primed for trouble, if it came our way. It was sure thoughtful of those outlaws to leave everything, even the guns—but I suppose they had bigger fish to fry. The ten thousand was mostly what they wanted.

It was just midnight when we pulled into Pend d'Oreille. From then until six o'clock MacRae and I slept side by side in a government bunk; the last bit of peaceful rest either was to know for many weeks.

CHAPTER III.

"REDUCED TO THE RANKS."

"There's Stony Crossing, Sarge; and over yonder, at the west end of that blue ridge, is Writing-on-the-Stone."

At the foot of the long slope on which we stood Milk River glinted in the sunshine, deceptively beautiful; a shining example of the truth of that old saw about distance lending enchantment; for, looking down on the placid stream slipping smoothly along between narrow fringes of scrubby timber, you'd never guess that miles and miles of hungry quicksand lined the river-edge, an unseen trap for the feet of the unwary.

Stony Crossing I could see, even without Mac's guiding finger. The Whoop-up trail, a brown streak against the vivid upland green, dipped down the hillside to our right, down to the sage-grown flat, and into the river by the great boulders that gave the ford its name. The blue ridge up the river I gave scant heed to; the Writing-Stone was only a name to me, for I'd never seen the place. The patch of dark-green trees below the crossing drew my roving gaze whether I would or no. I've ridden on pleasanter missions than the one that took us to Stony Crossing that day.

"It's hard lines," I muttered, "to know that a man you've eaten and slept with, and called your friend, is left to rot on the prairie like a skinned buffalo. Hanged if I can make myself believe we'll find Hank Rowan down there."

"We'll know beyond a doubt in the next half-hour; so come on."

We did know—all too soon. In the

clump of cottonwoods we found Hank Rowan, quite dead, the body of his horse stretched across his legs. His pockets had been turned inside out, and his papers and letters lay scattered around. These we gathered together against the time of meeting Lyn, and then we dragged him from beneath his horse and buried him in the soft leaf-mold where he lay, as we had buried his life-time partner early in the morning. When we had finished, MacRae hung in a tree the spade he had carried from Pend d'Oreille, and we mounted our horses and turned their heads toward Fort Walsh.

It is seventy miles in an air-line from Stony Crossing to the fort. That night we slept outdoors without hardship in a grassy hollow, for the night was comfortably warm, and noon of that day brought us to Walsh.

Above and below the huddle of log buildings set round the tall pole from which fluttered the Cross of St. George, fed scattered bunches of horses and freight cattle, and along the creek arose the smoke of a dozen dinner fires. By the post storeroom was ranged a line of the wagons—wheeled galleons of the plains, that brought food and raiment to the Northwest before the coming of steam and steel.

"Why, that's Baker's outfit from Benton," I said to MacRae, as we swung off our horses before the building where the officer of the day held forth. "They must have come by way of Assiniboine. I wonder where that other layout's from?"

"Paymaster's train," Mac answered. "At least he's due, and I notice a buck trooper herding the horses."

We clanked into the anteroom—that's what I call it, anyway. It happened that I didn't stay around those police posts long enough to get familiar with the technical terms for everything. Not that they didn't want me; faith, their desire for my company was only equaled by my capacity for dodging them. And if they'd been a little swifter, or I a bit slower, I'd have had ample leisure to observe life in the force from the inside—of the guard-house.

As I remarked previously, we went into the anteroom, and I got my first peep of the divinity that doth hedge—not a king, but a petty officer in her majesty's N. W. M. P.

An orderly held us up, and when we'd convinced him that our business was urgent, and not for his ears, he condescendingly allowed us to enter the Presence—who was a heavy-set person with sandy whiskers, set bias on a round, red countenance. His braid-trimmed uniform was cut to fit him like the skin of a well-stuffed sausage; and from behind a flat-topped desk he gazed upon us with the wisdom of a tree full of owls and the dignity of a stage emperor.

MacRae's heels clicked together, and his right hand went up in the military salute; the red-faced one acknowledged it by a barely perceptible flip of his fat paw, then put a little extra stiffening into his spinal column, and growled in a voice that seemed to echo in the region of his diaphragm: "Pro-ceed."

MacRae proceeded. But he didn't get very far. In fact, he'd barely articulated, "I have to report, sir, that——" when the human sausage bethought himself of something, and held up his hand for silence. He produced a watch, and studied it frowningly, then dismissed us with a ponderous gesture.

"Repawt," he rumbled, away down in his chest cavity, "at hawf-pawst—one."

"Yes, sir." MacRae saluted again, and we withdrew.

"A beautiful specimen!" I remarked sarcastically. "Have you many like him? I'd admire to see him cavorting around on the pinnacles after horse-thieves or whisky-runners. A peaceable citizen would sure do well on the other side of the line if sheriffs and marshals took a lay-off for dinner when a man was in the middle of his complaint. How long do you suppose it will take that fat slob to get a bunch of these soldier-policemen on the trail of that ten thousand?"

MacRae laughed dryly. "Old Dobson is harmless, all right, as far as hunting outlaws is concerned, but he doesn't cut much figure around here; no more

than two or three other 'haw-haw' Englishmen that got into the force some way. Lessard—the major in charge—is the brains of the post. He does things while these other fellows are untangling the red tape."

From there we rode to the stables. Every one seemed to know Mac, and to be glad to see him. When we'd unsaddled and fed our horses, he led the way toward a row of whitewashed cabins, set off to one side by themselves.

"We'll eat dinner with Bat Perkins," he said. "Bat's an ex-stock-hand, like myself, and we'll be as welcome as payday. And he'll know if Lyn Rowan has come to Walsh."

I wasn't in shape, financially, to have any choice in the matter of a stopping-place. Sixty or seventy dollars expense money was all the cash I had when I left Walsh for Benton; and, while I may have neglected to mention the fact, those two coin-collectors didn't overlook any small change when they held me up for LaPère's roll. There was a sort of shebang—you couldn't call it a hotel if you had any regard for the truth—at the fort, for the accommodation of wayfarers without a camp outfit, but most of the time you couldn't get anything fit to eat there. So I was mighty glad to hear about Bat Perkins.

It transpired, however, that before we reached Bat Perkins' cabin, Mac got an unexpected answer to one of the questions he intended to ask. As we turned the corner of a two-story log house that, from its pretentiousness, I judged to be some officer's quarters, we came face to face with a tall, keen-featured man in the police uniform, and a girl.

Even though Rutter had said she was to be at Walsh, I wasn't prepared to believe it was Lyn Rowan. She didn't give me much time to indulge in guesswork, though. While I wondered, for an instant, if there could be another woman on God's footstool with the same saucy tilt to her head, the same heavy coils of tawny hair, and those unfathomable purple-blue eyes that always met your own so frankly, she recognized the pair of us; though MacRae's uniform must have puzzled her for an instant.

"Gordon—and Sarge Flood! Where in the world did you come from? And —and——" She stopped rather suddenly. I know, just as well as if she'd said it, that she had been on the point of asking what he was doing in the yellow-striped breeches and red coat of a Mounted Policeman. If they had parted in anger, she forgot it while she spoke his name. Right there on the spot is where yours truly would have taken down the lover's lariat and tied to her hard and fast.

But MacRae—while I was wise to the fact that he was the only friend I had in that country, and the kind of a friend that sticks closer than a brother, I'd a hankering to beat him over the noodle with my gun, and knock a little of the stiffness out of his neck—simply saluted the officer, tipped his hat to her, and passed on. I didn't sabe the play, and when I saw the red flash up into her cheeks it made me hot, and there followed a few seconds when I had a blamed poor opinion of Mr. Gordon MacRae.

The fellow with her, I noticed, drew himself up very stiff and dignified when she spoke to us, and the look he favored MacRae with was the real thing in the way of disapproval; I might go further, and say it was malignant—the kind of look I'd give a man if I thought there was danger of him getting off with something I prized.

"I might fire that question back at you, Miss Rowan," I replied. "We're both a long way from home. I was here a couple of days ago. How did you manage to keep out of sight—or have you just got in?"

"Yesterday only," she returned. "We — you remember old Mammy Thomas, don't you?—came over from Benton with the Baker freight outfit. I expect to meet dad here in a few days."

Ugh! Say, do you know my backbone buckled like a caterpillar's when she spoke about her father! That bunch of cottonwoods and the dead horse and everything seemed to rise

right up between us, and for a second I was speechless. I couldn't stand there and tell her she'd never meet her father again this side of the pearly gates. Not I. That was a job for somebody that could put his arms around her and kiss the tears out of her eyes; somebody who could make her feel that life still held compensations for the loss of the fond old man, who'd lived and worked and died in a far country to make a stake for her.

I got my wits about me again, and started to make some commonplace remark, when his nibs with the shoulder-straps and the gold contraptions on his coat-collar cut in and interrupted.

"Really, we must hurry, Miss Rowan, or we shall be late for luncheon," he drawled.

"Just a moment, major," she ran on. "Are you going to be here any length of time, Sarge?"

"A day or so," I responded shortly; I didn't feel very cheerful with all that bad news simmering inside me, and I'd conceived a full-grown dislike for the "major" and his holier-than-thou attitude.

"Then come and see me. I'm staying with Mrs. Stone—Major Lessard's sister. There's a thousand things I want to talk about. Good-by." And she turned away, the uniformed snob by her side.

MacRae had purposely loitered, and I overtook him in a few rods.

"Well," I blurted, "you're a high-headed cuss, confound you!"

He shrugged his shoulders tolerantly. "Live, and you'll learn, Sarge. What did you expect me to do?"

"You might have—oh, well, I suppose you'll go your own gait, regardless," I sputtered; "that's your privilege. But I don't see how you had the nerve to pass *her* up that way. Especially after that Stony Crossing deal."

Mac took a dozen steps before he answered me.

"You don't understand the lay of things," he said, rather hesitatingly. "If I have the situation sized up right, Lyn is practically alone, and it's going to be a pretty bad time for her when she finds things out. And if she has made friends among the people who are *the* people here, it's up to me to stand back—until that cache is found and she doesn't need these fair-weather friends. You probably don't know it, and she couldn't realize it, but these officers' wives and sisters would drop her like a hot potato if she recognized a 'non-com' as a social equal. It sounds pretty rotten, but that's British style."

"Then you don't intend to see her, and talk this thing over?" I inquired.

"I can't, don't you see?" he replied impatiently. "That's for you, Sarge."

"Why the devil don't you chuck this job?" I flung out hotly. "Isn't there any way you can cut loose and be a free agent again?" It angered me to think of him having to bow the head and bend the knee to a lot of fat-heads, all puffed up with an exaggerated idea of their own importance.

"Yes," he returned, and a little bitterness crept into his tone, "there are two ways, but neither is open to me. I might desert, which would be a dirty way to sneak out of a thing I went into deliberately; or, if they were minded to allow me, I could buy myself out—and I haven't got the price."

"Who," I asked, remembering suddenly something I wanted to know, "was the jasper escorting Lyn?"

"Major Lessard," he answered shortly.

By this time we had come to the front yard of the last cabin in the row, and from the doorway a voice hailed us, and Bat Perkins appeared, both hands in his trousers pockets, and a pipe sagging down one corner of his mouth.

"Hello, there, Mac!" he greeted. "Just in time for grub pile."

I was duly made acquainted with Bat, and later with his wife, who, if she did have a trace of Indian blood in her, could certainly fill the bill when it came to feeding a hungry man. Bat, I discovered, was attached to the force in a civilian capacity.

We ate, smoked a cigarette apiece, and it was time for us to "repawt." So we betook ourselves back to the seat

of the mighty, to share our troubles with the men who guided the destinies of the turbulent Northwest, and see what they could do about it.

This time the orderly passed us in without delay, and once more we faced the man of rank, who, when he had sized us up, ordered MacRae to state his business. As he related the unvarnished tale of the banked fire, the hold-up, and the double killing, the sound of a footfall made me turn my head, and I saw in the doorway behind me Major Lessard, listening, a black frown on his eagle face. When MacRae had finished, and the incapable blockhead behind the desk regarded the two of us as though he considered us the victims of a bad dream, Lessard slammed the door shut and strode into the room.

"You can attend to your regular duties, Captain Dobson," he said to the red-faced numskull. "I'll take charge of this."

Standing at the end of the desk, he made MacRae reiterate the grim story in detail, then turned on him a battery of questions. Could he give a description of the men? Would he know them again? Why did he not exercise more precaution when investigating anything so suspicious as a concealed fire? Why this? Why that? Why did he not send a trooper to report at once, instead of wasting time in going to Stony Crossing? And a dozen more. With every word his thin-lipped mouth drew into harder lines, and the cold, domineering tone, weighted heavy with sneering emphasis, grated on me till I wanted to reach over and slap his handsome, smoothly shaven face. But MacRae stood at attention, heels together, shoulders squared, and took his medicine. He had to. He was in the presence, and answering the catechism, of a superior officer, and his superior officer, by virtue of a commission from the Canadian Government, could insult his manhood and lash him with a viperish tongue; and if he resented it by word or deed, there was the guard-house and the shame of irons—for discipline must be maintained at any cost! An enlisted man, I learned, hasn't any business to understand the definition of the word "insult."

"Why, damme!" Lessard stormed, "you've handled this like a green one fresh from over the water. You're held up; this man loses ten thousand dollars; another man is murdered under your nose—and yet you waste thirty-six hours blundering around the country to satisfy your infernal curiosity. It's incredible in a man of your experience under any hypothesis except that you stood in with the outlaws and held back to assure their escape!"

At first MacRae had looked puzzled. Then, under the lash of Lessard's bitter tongue, the dull red stole up into his weather-browned cheeks, glowed there an instant, and receded, leaving his face a waxy white; his left hand was at its old familiar trick, fingers shut tight over the thumb. And when Lessard flung out that last unthinkable accusation the explosion came.

"You lie, you —— —— ——!" MacRae spoke in a cold, impersonal tone, and only the flat, strained note betrayed his feeling, but the term he used was one to make a man's ears burn; it was the range-rider's gauntlet thrown squarely in an enemy's face. "You lie when you say that. I don't know your object, but I call your bluff—you—you insect!"

Lessard, if he had been blind till then, saw what was patent to me—that he had gone too far, that the man he had baited so unmercifully was primed to kill him if he made a hostile move. MacRae leaned forward, his hazel eyes twin coals, the thumb of his right hand hooked suggestively in the cartridge-belt close by his gun. They were a well-matched pair; iron-nerved, both of them; the sort of men to face death open-eyed and unafraid. A full minute they glared at each other. Then Lessard, without moving a muscle or changing his steady gaze, spoke.

"Captain Dobson," he said quietly, "call the orderly."

Dobson, mouth agape, dingled a little bell on the desk, and the orderly stepped in from the outer room.

"Orderly, disarm Sergeant MacRae."

Lessard uttered the command evenly, without bluster, his tone almost a duplicate of MacRae's. He knew men, that eagle-faced major; *he* knew that one jarring word, a single false motion, would mean a smoking gun. MacRae would have shot him in his tracks if he'd tried to reach a weapon. But a man that's dead game—which his worst enemy could not deny of MacRae—won't, *can't* shoot down another unless that other shows fight—and the knowledge of that gun-fighters' trait saved Major Lessard's hide from being badly punctured that day.

The orderly, a rather shaky orderly, if the truth be told (I think he must have listened through the keyhole), stepped up to Mac.

"Give me your side-arms, sergeant," he said nervously.

MacRae looked from one to the other, and for a breath I was as nervous as the trooper. It was touch and go just then; and if he'd gone the wrong way, I'd have gone with him, for friendship's sake, and there would have been a horrible mix-up in that two-by-four room. But he didn't. Just smiled; a sardonic kind of grimace, and unbuckled his belt without a word. He'd begun to cool.

"Reduced to the ranks! Thirty days in irons—solitary confinement!" Lessard snapped out, with a snarl, and the orderly led MacRae from the room.

"See Lyn, Sarge"—MacRae paused at the door, and flung the words over has shoulder, in Spanish—"and hold your horses till I get out."

When I turned again to Lessard he still stood at the end of the desk, industriously paring his finger-nails, and smiling broadly.

CHAPTER IV.

LYN.

If Lessard had played the martinet with MacRae, he was the essence of affability to me. (I'd have enjoyed punching his proud head, for all that; it was a dirty way to serve a man who had done his best.) While he pointed out the difficulty, in a country as big as the Northwest, of laying hands on men who knew they were wanted, he told me that it was a certainty they'd be captured if they undertook to spend any such sum of money at any trading-post within jurisdiction of the Mounted Police. Of course, if they crossed the line it would be different—but I'd have to take chances on that.

"I'll have to send a detail to bring in those bodies," he said, in conclusion. "No doubt it will be a trial for Miss Rowan, but I think she would feel better to have her father buried here—and, besides, the identification must be made complete. Will you go with the men? They might have trouble locating the graves."

I agreed to go, and left the office. The last thing he said was that I could hang out in Troop G's mess for a few days, if I didn't care to go back to Benton right away.

It never struck me till I was outside, but he passed up the gold episode altogether, didn't say if he intended sending any one to prognosticate around Writing-Stone or not. I wondered if he took any stock in Rutter's story, or just thought it one of the queer turns a man's brain will take sometimes when he's dying. At first it sounded off-color to me; but I knew old Hans pretty well, and he wasn't the sort of pilgrim that gets mixed in his mental processes. Besides—if there wasn't some strong incentive, why that double killing, to say nothing of the unbelievable devilishness that accompanied it?

Once out of the official atmosphere, I hesitated over my next move. Lessard's high-handed squelching of MacRae had thrown everything out of focus. We'd planned to report, see Lyn, if she were there, and then, with Pend d'Oreille as a base of operations, go on a still hunt for whatever the Writing-Stone might conceal. That scheme was knocked galley-west and crooked, for even when MacRae's time was up he'd get a long term of duty at headquarters, and, as a private, his comings and goings would be according to barrack rule instead of the free hand allowed a sergeant-in-charge at Pend d'Oreille; I

knew *that* much of the M. P. rules and regulations. And so far as my tackling single-handed a search for Hank Rowan's cache—well, I decided to see Lyn before I took that contract.

I hated that, too. It always went against my grain to be a bearer of evil tidings; I don't like to see a woman cry, especially one I like. Somebody had to tell her, though, and she might think it queer if I hung back and let some stranger blurt it out. So I got the first trooper I saw to show me where Mrs. Stone abode, and thither I rambled, wishing mightily for a good stiff jolt out of the keg old Piegan Smith and Mac had clashed over. But if there was any bottled nerve-restorer around Fort Walsh, it was tucked away in the officers' cellars, and not for the common herd; so I had to fall back on cigarettes.

Lyn happened to be sitting out in front when I reached the place. Another female person, whom I put down as Madam Stone, scuttled into the house at my approach. Lyn motioned me to a camp-stool close by her. I sat down, and immediately my tongue became petrified. My think-machinery was running against time, but words—if silence is truly golden, I was the richest man in Canada just then. My vocal organs refused to deliver themselves of anything but empty commonplaces: the kind your tongue carries in stock from force of habit. And before many minutes of verbal inanities, Lyn observed that something, as she put it, was lying heavy on my conscience, and hadn't I better confess and feel better?

"It isn't telling things that worries me," I lied; "though I have got some disagreeable news laid up for more than one person. There's a lot I want to *know;* how you came to be away up here by your lonesome, for instance; and what brought your father and old Hans——"

Those purple eyes widened, each one a question-mark.

"Who told you Hans was up here? I know I didn't mention him," she cut in. "Have you seen them?"

It's a wonder my face didn't betray me. I know I looked half-scared for a second. That was a question I'd gladly have passed up, but her eyes demanded an answer.

"I saw Hans the other day—just for a minute," I stammered. "But that can wait," I went on, hurrying to get off the subject, which I wasn't ready to open up. "What jarred you all loose from Texas? And what did you do to MacRae that he quit the South and went soldiering in this country?"

She backed away from that query, just as I expected. "We had oceans of trouble since you left there, Sarge," she told me, looking out across the barrack square. "It—it doesn't make pleasant telling. You remember Feltz, and that old trouble about the fence up the river? Well, it came to a head one day in Fort Worth, and they fought, and dad shot him. Of course Feltz had friends, and they tried to make it a case of murder. Dad was cleared, but that was the beginning of our bad luck. The trial cost an awful lot of money; and made enemies, too. Then Feltz's brother took it up, and started a range war against us on his own account—dad can give you the details when he comes." ("When he comes"—I shivered at that.) "To crown it all, the Texas fever got among the cattle. That just about finished us, Sarge." She let her eyes meet mine for an instant, and they were smiling, making light of everything. Lots of girls would have had a good cry over a hard-luck story like that. I thanked the Lord she was game when I remembered what I had to tell.

"Dad, you know, isn't the kind of man to sit around and whine," she said, and her head went up proudly. "I don't know where he got the idea of going to Peace River, but he sold what little stuff we had left and started out with Hans. I wanted to go along, but dad wouldn't listen to such a thing. They've been gone over two years. I'd get a letter about once in six months, and last time dad wrote he said they had made a good stake, and were coming home. So I just rounded up Mammy Thomas and came up here to meet

him; I could do that much, anyway. I sent him word I'd be here, and I've rather enjoyed the trip. Where did you see Hans? Wasn't dad with him?"

"No." I could say that truthfully enough. For the other question, I dodged that. "Look here, Lyn," I went on, "I'm going to tell you something on my own responsibility, and you mustn't take it that I'm trying to mix into your personal affairs. But I have a hunch that you're laboring under a mistaken impression, right now; that is, if you care anything about MacRae."

"I don't, though, really," she denied hastily; but she colored so that I knew she cared a heap more than she would ever admit to any one but MacRae.

"Well," I continued, "maybe you thought it was queer an old friend like him would pass you up like he did a while ago; but you're among a different breed of people; a heap different from what they are across the line. And these redcoats have standards of behavior that don't look like much to anybody raised among cowmen. Mac couldn't stop and chat with you while you were in the company of his superior officer. These shoulder-strapped gentry," I sneered, "don't consider an enlisted man worthy of social consideration—and they have a blamed poor opinion of anybody that does. You see, don't you? This is a pretty rough country for a woman, and, seeing you'd made friends with the people on top, he didn't want to queer you with them—they couldn't have dealt him any more misery, though," I concluded, as an afterthought, "if he'd held you up and talked for an hour."

She looked at me sharply, forgetting for the moment her inquiry about Hans.

"What do you mean?" she demanded, in that obey-me-at-once way I knew of old.

"MacRae's in trouble," I told her bluntly. "Major Lessard, who happens to be the big chief here, seems to have developed a sudden grudge against him. He raked Mac over the coals in a way that was hard to stand. You know MacRae, Lyn; it's mighty poor business for any man to crowd him too hard. He had to report a hold-up, and the major accused him of being in cahoots with the fellows that did it, because he did a little investigating on his own account before coming in to report. MacRae got hot under the collar, and came mighty near burning a little powder under the major's nose. So, for having the audacity to resent an insult, he's lost his sergeant's stripes, and is likewise taken to the guard-house to meditate by his lonesome for thirty days or so. So if you don't see him again, you'll know why."

It was rather a flippant way to talk, but it was the best I could do under the circumstances. The last three days hadn't been exactly favorable to a calm and cheerful state of mind.

But—who was the wise mortal that said: "No man knoweth the mind of a maid?" She sat there, apparently unmoved, her hands resting quietly in her lap. "I think we're all under a cloud, Sarge," she said slowly. "Maybe when dad comes he can furnish the silver lining. I—what are you thinking about, Sarge? You look as if you thought it my fault that Gordon is in trouble."

"No, no," I protested.

"But you do," she declared. "And it isn't. If he hadn't been so-so—why doesn't he get out of the Mounted Police? He doesn't have to stay against his will. At least"—with a smile—"he never *would* do anything unless it suited him." She took to staring out across the grounds again; and one hand drew up slowly till it was doubled into a tight-shut little fist.

"You might buy his release," I suggested, for want of something better to say, and forced a laugh to show that I was joking. "It only costs five hundred dollars" (MacRae had told me that), "and then you'd be entitled to a pair of wings—the good angel, you know."

The red went up into her face again. "I don't particularly like Major Lessard," she said, under her breath, keeping her face turned away. "When dad gets here—— What was that about Hans? Where did you see him, and why wasn't dad with him?"

She had me cornered at last, and I felt like breaking away right there, with the tale I had to tell crowding close. I'd rather have taken a good pounding than go on, but I couldn't beat about the bush any longer.

"It's a hard story, Lyn," I prefaced gently. "They had bad luck at the last. This bunch MacRae was after—when he didn't report—got wind of the gold Hans and your father were bringing out. They tried to get it. So far as I know they haven't succeeded yet. Hans tried to tell us where it was cached. There was a fight, you see—and he was hurt." I shivered, and hoped she didn't see. "MacRae and I came across him, and——"

I stopped, and got out cigarette material in an absent sort of way. My lips, I remember, were almighty dry just then.

"And dad?" Lyn was looking at me intently, and her tone was steady—that squeezed kind of steadiness that puts a crimp in a man to hear.

"He wasn't there." I drew a long breath and hurried on. "They got separated. Hans was about all in when we found him—he died in a little while. And then we went on to look for your father. We found him; too late to do anything. After we buried him—both of them—we came on here." I felt like a beast, but, at any rate, it was told; all that she need know, that is. I sat still and watched her, wondering nervously what she'd do.

It was a strain to sit there and say nothing. Lyn neither said nor did anything, at first. Maybe she cried afterward, when she got by herself, but not then; just looked at me; through me, almost, her face white and drawn, and her purple-blue eyes perfectly black. I got up at last and put one hand on her shoulder.

"It's hell, little girl, I know," I said. "We can't bring your father back to life, but we *can* run down the cold-blooded fiends that killed him. I have a crow to pick with them myself; and even if I didn't, I'd still be in the game. We'll get them, somehow, and the gold, too, when Mac gets out and can play his hand again. It was finding your father and giving him decent burial that kept us out so long. I don't understand yet why the major should pitch into MacRae so hard for doing that. You know Mac, Lyn, and you know me—we'll do what we can."

She didn't move for a minute; and the shocked, stricken look in her eyes grew more intense. Then she dropped her face in the palms of her hands with a stifled groan. "Sarge, I—I wish you'd go now," she whispered. "I want to—to be all by myself for a while. I must think."

I stood irresolute a second. It may have been my fancy, but I seemed to hear her whisper to herself: "Oh, Gordon, Gordon!" Then I stuck both hands deep in my pockets, and turned to go; it was not for me to comfort her. A hundred yards away I looked back. She still sat on the camp-stool, her head bowed on her hands, and the afternoon sun playing hide-and-seek in the heavy coils of her tawny-gold hair.

CHAPTER V.

THE VANISHING ACT, AND THE FRUITS THEREOF.

The rest of that afternoon I lay around the post, chafing under the forced inaction, and wondering just what I would do after I'd shown the redcoats those pitiful graves, and helped bring the bodies in. Even if I had a packhorse and a grub-stake, it would be like chasing a rainbow for me to start out on a lone hunt for Hank Rowan's cache; I didn't know the Writing-Stone country, and a man had no business wandering up and down those somber ridges, away from the big freight trails, unless he was anxious to be among the "reported missing"—which he sure would be if a bunch of non-treaty Indians ever got within gunshot of him.

I sat with my back against the shady wall of Troop G's barrack, and damned Major Lessard earnestly for his injustice to MacRae, and wondered if he would send some troopers to look for

that dust. I didn't see how he could get out of making a bluff at doing that, even if he put Rutter's story down as a fairy-tale. I intended to ask him about it when I saw him again.

About supper-time I started for the stables to feed and water my horse, and on the way I met Bat Perkins.

"Say, old-timer," he asked, lowering his voice, "is it right about Mac losin' his stripes and gettin' thirty days in clink?"

"It is," I answered resentfully.

"What for?" he wanted to know; and, because I was aching to express my opinion of the Mounted Police and all their works to somebody who'd understand, I told Bat all about it—except for the gold-dust; only four men—Dobson the fat-head, Lessard, MacRae, and myself—knew what little was known of that, and I wasn't spreading the news.

"Oh, they sure hand it to a man," Bat sympathized. "Mac's one uh the best men in the force, too. Darned if that don't sound queer to me! What else could he do? But Lessard's always breakin' out in a new place. Say, come up and stay with me while you're here," Bat offered; and I didn't study over accepting.

That night I sat in Bat's kitchen, and made gloomy forecasts of the next few days between cigarettes. About nine o'clock some one tapped lightly on the door. Bat answered the knock. His broad back shut off sight of whoever was there; I could just catch the murmur of a voice outside. Bat nodded emphatically, and closed the door. He came back to his chair with a grin, and handed me a little package. I tore it open, and found, wrapped tightly about three twenty-dollar gold pieces, an unsigned note from MacRae. It ran:

> Get after Lessard and see if he won't send you with an escort to Writing-Stone. If he does, and you find anything, I needn't tell you to be careful. I don't think he believes in our yarn, at all. If he won't act, stay here till I get out. This money will hold you for a while; it's all I could rustle. If you need more, perhaps Bat can help you out.

That was all. Not a word about Lyn. But that was the high-headed beggar's style.

"You know what this is, don't you?" I asked Bat. "How the dickens did he manage it?"

Bat laughed silently. "There ain't a buck trooper in the post," he replied, "that wouldn't help Mac if he got half a show; he's a white man. It's easy for a prisoner to slip a note to a friend that happens to be mounting guard. He sent it to me because I'd be apt to know where yuh was. Sabe?"

I did. It struck me that Mac's idea was a good one to follow up. Lessard could hardly refuse to do that much; and it would be rather unhealthy for those prairie pirates to match themselves against four or five Mounted Policemen—provided we found anything that was worth fighting over—if they were on their guard.

Bat spread a bed for me on the kitchen floor, and I catnapped till daylight. Lessard had told me to be ready at nine o'clock in the morning. When the first sunbeam stole through the window at Bat's tiny kitchen, I pulled on my boots and went to feed my horse. After we'd eaten breakfast I headed straight for Lessard's quarters.

"Look here, major," I said, mustering up a semblance of heartiness that lacked a lot of being the real thing—I didn't like him, and it galled me to ask anything of him, "have you talked this affair over with Miss Rowan?"

"Yes. Why?" He was very curt, but I pocketed my feelings and persisted.

"Then you must know that there was something in Rutter's story," I proceeded. "Hank Rowan was my friend. I'd go out of my way any time to help his daughter. Will you send four or five of your men to Writing-Stone with me, to look for that stuff?" I asked him pointblank.

He looked me up and down curiously, and said nothing for a minute. "How do you know where to look?" he suddenly demanded. "Writing-Stone ridge is ten miles long." His cold, gray eyes rested on my face with an odd, speculative stare. "I thought Rutter

died before giving you the exact location?"

As a matter of fact, MacRae, in detailing the lurid happenings of that night, did not repeat the words Hans had gasped out with his last breath. He simply said that Rutter died after telling us that they had been attacked, and that the gold was hidden at Writing-Stone. And Lessard, as I said before, had passed up the gold episode; all the questions he had asked MacRae were about the robbers. Those steadily reiterated phrases, "raw gold—on the rock," might hold some meaning if one were on the spot, but MacRae had kept that to himself—and I wasn't running a bureau of information for Lessard's benefit. The Canadian Government might trust him, but I wouldn't—not if he took oath on a stack of Bibles, and gave a cast-iron bond.

I don't know why I felt that way at the time. Perhaps it was his personality. He was the kind of man you couldn't overlook, a big, magnetic sort of brute; the kind that women go crazy over, and other men hate. Anyway, I didn't feel like telling him everything I knew.

"He did," I answered. "But we can take a chance. Send men that know the country. Lyn Rowan hasn't a relative on earth now; that money means a lot to her."

"H—m-m." He mused a few seconds. Then: "If I can spare the men, I'll see what can be done after those bodies are brought in. You, of course, are ready to start?"

I nodded.

"Sergeant Goodell is in charge of the detail. You'll probably find him at the commissary. That's all."

It was like being dismissed from parade or something. I thanked the Lord that the "force" had no strings on me; I wasn't used to taking orders in that tone of voice from anybody. I didn't stop, however, to argue that point with him.

It wasn't much of a trick to find Sergeant Goodell. Four men, besides myself, made up the party—Goodell, two privates, and a half-breed who was attached to Fort Walsh in the capacity of scout. They were busy loading grub on a packhorse, and each of the buck policemen had a led horse tied to his saddle-horn—for what purpose I could easily guess. By the time I saddled up and rode back to the commissary they were ready, and we left the post, following in the dusty wake of the paymaster's blue wagon and its mounted escort.

For ten or twelve miles we kept the MacLeod trail, never more than a half-mile behind the "transient treasury," as Goodell jokingly termed it. He was a pretty bright sort, that same Goodell; altogether too quick-witted to be an Englishman; for that matter, none of the three carried the stamp of his nationality on his face or in his speech. They might have been any breed—of white blood; but they sat their horses like men born to rough-riding; and a good rider usually does other things equally well. The scout I didn't take much notice of, except that when he spoke, which was seldom, he was given to using better language than lots of white men I know.

Goodell swung away from the beaten track presently, and headed straight for Stony Crossing. At noon we camped and cooked dinner while the horses grazed; ate, and went on again.

About four o'clock, as near as I could judge, we dipped into a wooded creek bottom. The creek itself went brawling along in a deep-worn channel; and when my horse struck the water he promptly stopped, and plunged his muzzle into the stream to drink. The others kept on, climbed the bank, and passed from view—and that was the last I saw of them for some time! I got off, cinched up my saddle, and rolled a cigarette, secure in the knowledge that they couldn't get more than two or three hundred yards ahead of me. But when I rode out of the water-washed gully they had utterly disappeared.

It was many a moon ere I knew how I had missed them; how and why they had vanished so completely from the face of the earth in those few minutes. The print of steel-rimmed hoofs

showed in the soft loam as plain as a moccasin-track in fresh snow. Around a grove of quaking-asp, eternally shivering in the deadest of calms, their trail led through the long grass that carpeted the bottom, and out on the level, gravelly bench above. No farther. If there was other mark of their passing, it was hidden from me.

Wondering, I spurred up, and loped to a point that overlooked the creek a full mile up and down. Cottonwood and willow, cut-bank and crooning water lay green and brown and silver-white before me; but no riders, no thing that lived and moved came within scope of my vision.

I turned away from the bank and raced up the green slope for a saw-backed ridge that promised largely of unobstructed view. A dirty gray lather stood out in spumy rolls around the saddle-blanket edge; and the wet flanks of my horse heaved like the shoulders of a sobbing woman when I checked him on top of a bald sandstone peak—and, though as much of the Northwest as one man's eye may hope to cover lay bared on every hand, yet the quartet that rode with me from Fort Walsh occupied no part of the landscape.

I could see ten miles; and, except for a little herd of buffalo which fed peacefully within sound of my voice, I could see nothing but rolling prairie, threaded here and there with darker lines, that stood for creeks and coulées.

I got off and sat upon a rock, rolled a cigarette, and waited. The way to Stony Crossing led over the ridge, a half-mile on either side of me, as the spirit moved a traveler who followed an approximately straight line. Whatever road they had taken, they could not be more than three or four miles from that sentinel peak—there's a well-defined limit to the distance a mounted man may go in a given space of time. And from my roost I could note the passing of anything bigger than a buffalo yearling within a radius of six or seven miles. Therefore I smoked my cigarette without misgiving, and watched for bobbing black dots against the far-flung green.

I might have petrified on that pinnacle for all I saw. The sun dropped lower; dropped till its under edge rested on the rim of the world, and long, black shadows crept out of the low places, and buttes and ridges were crowned with clear gold, last gift of a dying day—only then did I own to myself that, by hook or by crook—mostly by crook, I began to think—they had given me the slip.

A cow-puncher hates to admit that he can lose himself from his fellows in five minutes, especially when they run four in a bunch; but I sure managed it that day. They had left me holding the sack in a mighty poor snipe country. And when the creeping shadows blanketed pinnacle and lowland alike, and all that remained of the sun was the flamboyant crimson-yellow on the gathering clouds, I forked my dun *caballo* and headed for Pend d'Oreille.

Before I'd gone two miles, the hoodoo that had been working overtime on my behalf ever since I crossed the line got busy again. The clouds that were rolling up from the west at sundown piled thick and black overhead; and for all practical purposes I was a blind man in a strange country, wasting prodigally the strength of my horse in bootless wandering. So I sought a sheltered place, and camped—and a blamed lean camp I found it.

About midnight the combination of sultry heat and banked clouds produced the usual results. Lightning first; lightning that ripped the sky open from end to end and from side to side in great blazing gaps; and thunder that cracked and boomed and rumbled till a man couldn't hear himself think; then rain in big, flat chunks, as if some one had yanked the bottom out of the sky and let the accumulated moisture of centuries drop on that particular portion of the Northwest. In five minutes the only dry part of me was the crown of my head, thanks be to a good Stetson hat. And my arms ached from the strain of hanging onto my horse, for he wanted to get up and quit Canada post-haste when the fireworks began.

When the storm drifted by and the

stars came blinking out, a cold wind whistled up from the east, and I spent the rest of the night shivering in my clammy clothes.

At daybreak I saddled up and broke for a high divide, so as to get the benefit of the first sun-rays. But the hoodoo was still hard on my trail. I topped a little rise, and almost rode plump into the arms of a bunch of Indians. Numbers I can't give; I hadn't the time nor inclination to count. The general ensemble of war-paint and spotted ponies was enough; I comprehended what it meant to me, and fled in the opposite direction like a scared antelope.

Only their rotten shooting saved me. If they'd been white men, I'd have been curled in a neat heap inside of a hundred yards. As it was, they shot altogether too close for comfort; and the yells they turned loose in that peaceful atmosphere made me feel that I was due to be forcibly separated from the natural covering of my cranium if I lost any time getting out of their sphere of influence.

The persistent beggars chased me a good ten miles before they concluded that I was too well-mounted for them to overhaul. But it might have been a lot worse; I still had my scalp intact; and I'd made good time in the direction I wanted to go. Thereafter I kept on high ground, where I could see a mile or two, for I was very much alive to the fact that if one of those surprise-parties jumped me when my horse was tired, it was a cinch that they'd have a lot of fun with me; and an Indian's idea of fun doesn't coincide with mine, not by a long shot!

I made some pointed remarks to my horse about Mr. Goodell and his companions as I rode along. If Pend d'Oreille hadn't been the nearest place, I'd have turned back to Walsh and made that bunch of exhumers come after me, if it was absolutely necessary that I should pilot them. Personally, I thought those two old plainsmen, if they could have been consulted in the matter, wouldn't thank Major Lessard for disturbing their last, long sleep; the wide, unpeopled prairies had been their lifelong home, and I felt that they'd rather be laid away in some quiet coulée than in a conventional graveyard, with headstones and an iron fence around them. A Western man likes lots of room, dead or alive; it irks him to be crowded.

A little past noon I reached Pend d'Oreille. I'd just got nicely started on the remains of the troopers' dinner, when Goodell and his outfit popped over the hill that looked down on the post, and came riding up to the mess-house as nonchalantly as you please.

"Well, you beat us in," Goodell greeted airily. "You must have found a short cut."

"Sure thing," I responded.

"Where the deuce *did* you go, anyway, after you stopped in the creek?" he asked, with much apparent curiosity. "We like to played out our horses galloping around looking for you—when we'd gone about a mile, and you didn't catch up."

"Then you must have kept darned close to the coulée bottoms," I retorted ungraciously, "for I burned the earth getting up on a pinnacle where you could see me before you had time to go very far."

"Oh, well, it's easy to lose track of a man in this big country," he returned, unruffled. "We all got here, so what's the odds?"

It struck me that he was uncommonly philosophical about it, so I merely grunted, and went on with my dinner.

That evening, when we were at the stable fixing up our horses for the night, I perceived that they had been doing some tall riding, all right. Their mounts couldn't have looked worse if they had been dragged through a knot-hole three sizes too small. By comparison, my tired, sweat-grimed horse was fresh as a morning breeze.

CHAPTER VI.

THE SECOND HOLD-UP.

It took us all of the next day to make the trip from Pend d'Oreille to Stony Crossing and back by way of the place

where Rutter was buried. Goodell had no fancy, he said, for a night camp on the prairie, when it could be avoided. By making an early start from Pend d'Oreille, we could reach Walsh by riding late the next night. So we swung back to the river post well toward evening. I felt anything but cheerful. The ghastly burdens, borne none too willingly by the extra horses, put a damper on me, and I'm a pretty sanguine individual, as a rule; but Goodell and his redcoats weren't troubled by dead men, apparently. They might have been packing so much merchandize.

When we had unloaded the two bodies from the snorting horses, and laid them in a lean-to at the stable-end, we led our mounts inside; and Goodell paused in the doorway and emitted a surprised whistle at sight of a horse in one of the stalls. I looked over his shoulder, and recognized at a glance the rangy black MacRae had ridden.

"They must have given his horse to another trooper," I said.

"Not what you could notice," Goodell replied, as he went on in. "They don't switch mounts in the force. If they have now, it's the first time. When a man's in clink, his horse stands in the stable till his time's up. And Mac got thirty days. Well, we'll find out who rode him in, pretty quick."

I pulled the saddle off my horse and slapped it down on the floor, and went stalking up to the long cabin. The first man my eyes lighted on as I stepped inside was MacRae, humped disconsolately on the edge of a bunk. Maybe I wasn't glad to see him! But I hadn't time to say more than "Hello!" before Goodell and the others came in. Mac drew a letter from his pocket and handed it to Goodell.

He glanced quickly through it; then eyed the rest of us with a quizzical smile. "By Jove! you must have a pull with the old man, Mac," he laughed. "I suppose you know what's in this billy-doo?"

"Partly," Mac answered.

"I'm to turn Hicks and Gregory over to you"—Goodell read the note again to make sure of his words—"and leave you to your own devices. What's the excitement, anyway? Piegan on the war-path again? Bull-train missing, or whisky-runners getting fresh, or what? The major has established a precedent; you're the first man that hasn't had to serve full time in clink. Tell us how you managed it, Mac. We might want to get a sentence suspended some day. We're all liable to get it."

"The high-and-mighty sent me out to lead a forlorn hope," Mac responded dryly. "Does that look like a suspended sentence?" He turned his arm so that we could see the ripped stitching where his sergeant's stripes had been cut away.

"Most of us have been there," Goodell observed sympathetically; and there the subject rested.

Though I was burning to know things, we had no chance to talk that evening. Nine lusty-lunged adults in that one room prohibited confidential speech. Not till next morning, when we rode away from Pend d'Oreille, with the sun lazily clearing the hilltops, and a week's grub packed on an extra horse, did MacRae and I have opportunity to unburden our souls.

When we were fairly under way in the direction of Writing-on-the-Stone, Hicks and Gregory — the half-breed scout—lagged fifty or sixty yards behind; and MacRae turned in his saddle and gave me a queer look.

"I wasn't joking last night when I told Goodell that this was a forlorn hope," he said. "Are you ready to take a chance on getting your throat cut or being shot in the back, Sarge?"

I stared at him a second. It sounded more like the language of a conspirator in a howling melodrama than a cold-blooded statement of fact; but he was looking at me soberly enough, and he wasn't in the habit of saying startling things for the sake of effect.

"That depends," I returned. "Why?"

"Because if we find what we're after, that's the sort of formation we'll have to buck against until we get that stuff to Fort Walsh," he replied grimly. "Beautiful prospect, eh? Listen to me, Sarge, and don't be surprised at anything I say.

"The day you left, Lessard had me up on the carpet again. When he got through cross-questioning me, he considered a while, and finally told me that, under the circumstances, he felt that loss of rank was punishment enough for the insubordination I'd been guilty of, and he'd revoke the thirty-day sentence. I pricked up my ears at that, you bet, because he isn't built that way. When you talk to an officer the way I did to him, you get all that's coming to you, and then some. I began to see light pretty quick, however. He said that he'd spoken to Miss Rowan about the gold business, and learned that her father and Hans Rutter were sure enough headed this way with between forty and fifty thousand dollars' worth of dust. Since I'd been on the spot when Rutter died, and knew the Stone country so well, he thought I'd stand a better show than some of the others of finding their cache. So he wrote that order to Goodell, and started me out to join you—with a warning that we'd better keep our eyes open, for undoubtedly the men who killed those two old fellows and held us up would be watching for a chance at us if we found the gold."

"We knew that much," I interrupted, "without him to tell us."

"Certainly," Mac agreed. "But wait a minute. This was about three in the afternoon, and he ordered me to pull out at once, so I could catch you fellows as soon as possible. I started at half-past three. You remember the paymaster's train left that same morning. He had a mounted escort of ten, besides teamsters. The MacLeod trail, you know, runs about twenty miles north of here. I followed it, knowing about where they'd stop for the night, and thinking I'd make their camp and get something to eat and a chance to sleep an hour or two; then I could come on here early in the morning. I got to the place I figured they would be about eleven o'clock, but they'd made better time than usual, and gone farther, so I quit the trail and struck across the hills, for I didn't want to ride too far out of the way. When I got on top of the first big divide, I ran onto a spring, and stopped to water my horse and let him pick a bit of grass; I 'd been riding eight hours, and still had quite a jaunt to make. I must have been about three miles south of the trail then."

He stopped to light the cigarette he had rolled as he talked, and I kept still, wondering what would come next. MacRae wasn't one to talk at that length unless he had something to tell.

"I sat there about an hour, I reckon," he went on. "By that time it was darker than a stack of black cats, and fixing to storm, and I thought I might as well move on as sit there and get soaked to the hide. While I was tightening up the cinch, I heard a couple of shots, then in a second a regular fusillade—away off, you know; about like a stick of wood cracking in a stove when you're outside the cabin. I loped out of the hollow by the spring, and looked down toward the trail. The red flashes were breaking out like a bunch of firecrackers, and with pretty much the same sound. It didn't last long; maybe a minute or two. I listened quite a while, but there was nothing to be seen, and I heard no more shooting.

"Now, I knew that the pay-wagon was somewhere on that road, and it struck me that the bunch that got Hans and Rowan, and held us up, might have tried the same game on it; and, from the noise, I judged it hadn't been a walkaway. It was a wild guess, but I thought I'd go down and see. Single-handed, and so dark that you could almost feel, I knew I was able to sidestep trouble if it was Indians or whisky-runners and I didn't care to mix in.

"I'd gone about a mile down the slope when the lightning began to tear the sky open. In five minutes the worst of it was right over me, and one flash came on top of the other, like a big eye winking. One second the hills and coulées would show plain as day, and the next you'd have to feel to find the ears of your horse. I pulled up, for I didn't care to go down there with all that lightning-play to make a shining mark of me; and, while I sat there wondering how long it would last, a

sizzling streak went sigzagging up out of the north, and another out of the west; and when they met overhead, and the white glare spread across the clouds, it was like the sun breaking out over the whole country. It lit up everything for as much as ten seconds, and showed me four riders coming up the slope on a high run. I don't think they saw me at all, for they passed me, in the dark that shut down after the lightning, so close that I heard the *pat-a-pat* of the hoofs. And when the next flash came they weren't in sight.

"A few minutes after that the rain hit me like a spring flood. That was over quick, and when it settled to a drizzle, I went on down to the paymaster's camp—I'd caught a glimpse of it when that infernal lightning was playing tag in the clouds. Things were sure in an uproar at the camp. Two men dead, two or three more badly shot up, and the paymaster raving like a maniac. I'd pretty nearly called the turn. The gentlemen that passed me on the ridge had held the outfit up—and looted a hundred thousand dollars in cold cash!"

"What!" I broke in. "A hundred thousand—and they got off with it!"

"Slick and clean," Mac answered calmly. "They made a sneak on the camp in the pitch-dark, knifed both sentries, and had their guns on the rest before they knew anything was wrong. They got the money, and took every horse in camp. The shooting I heard came off as they started away with the plunder. Some of the troopers grabbed up their guns and cut loose at random; and these hold-up people returned the compliment with deadly effect.

"That isn't all," he continued moodily. "I stayed there till daylight, and gathered up their live stock. All the thieves wanted of the horses was to set the outfit afoot temporarily—which trick bears the earmarks of the bunch that held us up that night. They'd turned every horse loose a mile or so away, and I found them feeding all together. When I'd brought them in I got a bite to eat, and came on about my own business.

"Up on the ridge, within a few hundred yards of the spring I'd stopped at, I came slap on their track; the four shod horses had pounded a trail in the wet sod that a kid could follow. I tore back to the paymaster's camp, and begged and prayed him to send all the men he could spare, and we'd follow it up. But he wouldn't listen to such a thing. I don't know why, unless he had some money they had overlooked, and was afraid they'd come back after it. So I went back and hit the trail alone. From the top of the ridge it led due south for about ten miles, to a timbered bottom on Sage Creek. There they had two extra horses cached in the brush. They'd picked them up and swung west toward Pak-o-Gee Lake; and about noon their trail ran out into nothing on the gravelly beach of Pak-o-Gee, ten miles north of Writing-Stone. I quit then. That was day before yesterday. I got to Pend d'Oreille yesterday morning, two hours after you fellows left for the Crossing.

"That's partly why," he said thoughtfully, "I think we'll have our hands full if we do locate that stuff. It's a big chunk of money, and a little thing like killing a man or two won't stop them. We'll be watched every minute of the time we prowl around those painted rocks. That's a cinch. And when we've pulled the chestnut out of the fire they'll gobble it—if they can."

I haven't quite got a gambler's faith in a hunch, or presentiment or instinctive conclusion, whatever you choose to term it, but from the moment he spoke of seeing four riders on that ridge during the frolic of the elements, a crazy idea kept persistently turning over and over in my mind; and when Mac got that far, I blurted it out for what it was worth, prefacing it with the happenings of the trip from Walsh to Pend d'Oreille. If I thought to surprise him, it didn't work; he listened without the interest it seemed to me to demand, tapping his fingers idly on the saddle-horn, and staring straight ahead with an odd pucker to his mouth.

"I was just going to ask you if you all came through together," he remarked, in a casual tone. "I neglected

to say that I got a pretty fair look at the face of the gentleman who rode in the lead of the four."

"The devil!" I muttered. "Did you know—was my hunch right?" I demanded eagerly.

"I could shoot over my shoulder and hit him, right now," Mac answered, through his teeth. "It was Gregory! Now you see what we're up against, Sarge."

While I was digesting this, Hicks and Gregory caught up, and for the rest of the journey we four rode elbow to elbow, and conversation was scant.

Mid-afternoon saw us camped under the Writing-Stone. Taking everything into consideration, I began to think we were in no immediate danger of getting our throats cut for sake of the treasure. Hans had said "under the Stone"—rather vague directions, for the Stone, roughly estimated, was a good mile in length.

It faced the river, a perpendicular wall of gray sand rock. An aptly-named place, too; wherever a ledge gave foothold, and even in places that seemed beyond reach of human hands, the bald front of the cliff was chiseled and painted with the picture-writing of the Blackfeet tribe. The history of a thousand battles and buffalo-hunts was written there. And somewhere at the foot of that mile-long cliff, under the rude figures carved and painted by the red men in their hour of triumphant ease, lay the fortune that was Lyn Rowan's, if we could find it and cheat the human wolves that had marked it for their own.

When dark came we paired off for the night. Mac and I crawled up on a rock-ledge to roll out our blankets—in a place where we couldn't well be surprised. Not that we anticipated anything of the sort so early in the game; when we'd found what we were after that would come. But the mere fact that we were all playing a part made us inclined to caution.

It was quite an effort to treat those two red-handed renegades as if they were true-blue partners in a risky enterprise. But we had to do it; until they showed their hand we could do nothing but stand pat; and if they watched us unobtrusively, we did the same by them. It's mighty hard on the nerves, though, to be in touch all day, and lie down to sleep at night, within a few feet of men that you imagine are only waiting the proper moment to introduce a chunk of lead into your system, or slip a knife under your fifth rib. I can't truthfully say that either of us slept well that night.

CHAPTER VII.

WHAT HAPPENED AT THE STONE.

Three days later Mac and I scaled the steep bank at the west end of the cliff, and threw ourselves, panting, on the level that ran up to the sheer drop-off. When we'd got back the breath we'd lost on that mansard-roof climb, we drew near to the edge, where we could stare into the valley four hundred feet below, while we made a cigarette.

We were just a mite discouraged. Beginning that first morning at the east end of the Writing-Stone, we had worked west, conning the weather-worn face of it for a mark that would give a clue to the cache. Also we had scanned carefully the sandy soil patches along the boulder-strewn base, seeking the telltale footprints of horse or man. And we had found nothing.

Each day the conviction grew stronger upon us that finding that gold would be blind chance, or a miracle of luck; systematic search had, so far, resulted in nothing but blistered heels from much walking. And, unless we did find it, thereby giving the gentlemen of the masks a chance to match themselves against us, we weren't apt to have the opportunity of breaking up a nervy bunch of murdering thieves.

We reasoned that the men whose guns we had faced over Rutter's body, and those who held up the paymaster on the MacLeod trail, were tarred with the same stick; likewise, that even now two of them ate out of the same pot with us three times daily. The thing was to prove it.

Personally, the paymaster's trouble was none of my concern; what I wanted was to get back that ten thousand dollars, or deal those jaspers ten thousand dollars' worth of misery. Not that I wasn't willing to take a long chance to help Lyn to her own, but I was human enough to remember that I had something at stake myself. It was a pretty grouchy stock-hand, name of Flood, who blew cigarette smoke out over the brow of Writing-Stone that evening.

Mac finished his smoke and ground the stub into the earth with his heel. For a minute or two longer he sat quiet, flipping pebbles over the bank.

"I reckon we might as well follow along the top to camp," he said at last, getting to his feet. "I sent that blamed breed back, down there, so I could talk without having to keep cases on him. This is beginning to look like a hopeless case, isn't it, Sarge?"

"Some," I admitted. "I did think that what Hans said would put us on the right track; but I don't see any meaning in it now. I suppose we'll just have to keep on going it blind."

"Of course; we'll have to stick it out as long as there's a ghost of a show," he said. "But I've been thinking that it might be a good plan to take a fall out of these two." He jerked his thumb in the direction of camp. "If we've sized them up right, it will set things moving; and if we're mistaken there'll be no harm done. I'll tell you my idea. We can *pretend* to locate this stuff. Fix up a couple of dummy sacks, you know, and get them to camp and packed on the horse without letting them see what's inside. If Lessard told me right, there is between a hundred and forty or fifty pounds of dust. It's small in bulk, but heavy as a bad conscience. If we had a couple of little sacks we could get around that problem easy enough—this black sand along the river would pass for gold-dust in weight. We could play excited, and give them the chance they're looking for. If they make a break, it'll be up to us to get the best of them."

"It might work. If you think it would make them tip their hand I'm with you," I replied. "This watch-the-other-fellow business is making me nervous as an old woman. Once we got those two dead to rights, they might let out something that would put us next to the rest of the bunch; and when we had them all rounded up we could come back and hunt for Rowan's gold-dust in peace."

"You've got the idea exactly," Mac returned. "But don't get married to the notion that they'll cough up all they know right off the reel. Hicks might, if you went at him hard enough. But not the other fellow. Gregory's game clear through—he's demonstrated that in different ways since I've been in the force. You could carve him to pieces without hearing a cheep, if he decided to keep his mouth shut. And he's about as dangerous a man as I know. If there's a row, don't overlook Mr. Gregory."

We hoofed it for camp as briskly as our galled feet would permit, for the sun was getting close to the sky-line, talking over the scheme as we went. There wasn't much danger of being overheard up on that bench. As a matter of fact, Hicks and Gregory didn't know we were up there; at least, they were not supposed to know.

Mac had made a practise of always leaving one in camp to watch the horses. That afternoon Hicks stayed in. When he started Gregory back, he told him that he would poke along slowly, and then sat down on a rock and watched the breed. When he was far enough up the flat to lose track of our movements, we dropped into a washout, and sneaked along it to the foot of the bank, where a jutting point of rock hid sight of us climbing the hill.

We hadn't thought of spying on them at first; it was simply to be clear of their onerous presence for a while. But as we came near camp MacRae took a notion to look down and see what they were about. At a point that overlooked the bottom two hundred yards or so from the east end of the Stone, we got down on our stomachs and wiggled carefully to the naked rim of the rock.

A long minute we lay there, peering

over at the men below. Hicks was puttering around a fire, cooking supper, evidently; and Gregory was moving the picket-rope of his horse to fresh grass. There was nothing out of the ordinary to see, and I drew back; but Mac still lay there. When he did finally back up his eyes were eloquent.

"I've found it," he calmly announced.

"What!"

"I've found it," he repeated, a trace of exultation in his tone. "At least it amounts to the same thing. Crawl up there again, Sarge, and look straight down at the first ledge from the bottom. Hurry; you won't see anything if the sun has left it. Be careful. We don't want to rouse their suspicions till we have to."

Cautiously I peered over the brink, straight down, as Mac had directed. The shadow that follows on the heels of a setting sun was just creeping over the ledge, but the slanting rays lingered long enough to give me plain sight of a glittering patch on the weather-beaten stone below. While I stared, the sun withdrew its fading beams from the whole face of the cliff; but even in the duller light a glint of yellow showed dimly, a pin-point of gold in the deepening shadow.

Gold! I crawled back from the rim of Writing-Stone, a set of never-to-be-forgotten phrases ringing in my ears. Mac caught my eye, and grinned. *"Gold—raw gold—on the rock above."* I mouthed the words parrotlike, and he nodded comprehendingly.

"Oh, thunder!" I exclaimed. "Do you reckon *that's* what he meant?"

"What else?" Mac reasoned. "They'd mark the place, somehow—and those are his exact words. What dummies we were not to look on those ledges. You can't see the surface of them from the flat; and we might have known they wouldn't put a mark where it could be seen by every pilgrim that happened along."

"Lord, I hope you're right!" I grunted optimistically.

"We'll settle it beyond a doubt in the morning," Mac declared. "To-night we won't do anything but eat, drink, and be merry as possible. I prefer to have a few hours of daylight ahead of me when we raise that cache. Things are apt to tighten, and I don't like a rumpus in the dark. Just now I'm hungry, and that stuff will keep. Come on to camp, Sarge; our troubles are either nearly over or just beginning."

We followed the upland past the end of the Stone, till we found a slope that didn't require wings for descent. If Hicks or Gregory wondered at our arrival from the opposite direction they didn't betray any unseemly curiosity. Supper consumed the twilight hour, and when dark shut down we took to our blankets and dozed through the night.

At daybreak we breakfasted. Without a word to the others MacRae picked up his carbine and walked out of camp. I followed at once. It was barely a hundred yards to the ledge. I caught myself wishing it a good deal farther—out of range of those watchful eyes—and wondering how it would feel to be potted at the moment of discovery.

"I thought we'd let them stay behind and do a little guessing," Mac explained, when we stood under the shelf upon which we had looked down the evening before. "We're right under their noses, so they won't do anything till the stuff's actually in sight."

He regarded the face of the cliff a minute. The ledge jutted out twenty feet above our heads, but it could be reached by a series of jagged points and knobs; a sort of natural stairway—though some of the steps were a long way apart. Boulders of all shapes and sizes lay bedded in the sandy soil where we stood.

"Shin up there, Sarge," MacRae commanded, "and locate that mark. It ought to be an easy climb."

I "shinned," and reached the ledge with a good deal of skin peeled from various parts of my person. The first object my eyes fell upon, as I hoisted myself onto the four-foot ledge, was a dull yellow spot on the rock, so near that I could lean forward and touch it with my fingers. A two-inch circle of the real thing—I'd seen enough gold in the raw to know it without any

acid test—hammered into the coarse sandstone.

I pried it up with the blade of my knife, and looked it over. Originally it had been a fair-sized nugget. Hans or Rowan had pounded it into place with the back of a hatchet—the corner-marks told me that—flattening it to many times its natural diameter. I threw it down to MacRae, and looked carefully along the ledge. There was no other mark that I could see; I began to wonder if we were as hot on the scent as we had thought.

"Is there a piece of rock up there?" Mac called to me, after a little. "If there is, set it on the ledge in line with where this was."

I found a fragment the size of my fist, and set it on the rim of the ledge. He squinted up at it a moment, then nodded, smiling.

"Come on down now, Sarge," he grinned; and, seating himself on a rock, began to roll a cigarette, as if the finding of Hank Rowan's gold cache was a thing of no importance whatever.

"Well," I began, when I had negotiated that precarious succession of knobs and notches, and accumulated a fresh set of bruises, "why don't you get busy? How much wiser are you now? Where's your gold-dust?"

He took a deliberate puff, and squinted up at the ledge again. "I'm sitting on it, as near as I can figure," he calmly asserted.

"Come off!" I fleered.

"Stand right behind me," he said, "and look up at that stone you set for a mark. Don't you see anything?"

Getting behind him, I looked up. In days gone by some warrior had stood on that selfsame ledge, and hewed with a flint chisel what he and his fellows doubtless considered a work of art. Uncanny-looking animals, and uncanny-ier figures that I mentally classed as missing links, cavorted in a long line across that tribal picture-gallery. Between each group of figures the rock was adorned with mysterious signs and rudely limned weapons. Right over the stone marker, and straight in line, a long-shafted war-lance was carved—the blade pointing down. MacRae's seat, stone marker, and aboriginal spear-head—the three lined up like the sights of a modern rifle.

"It looks like you might have struck it," I admitted.

Mac threw away his cigarette. "Here's where we find out," he said.

We wormed our fingers under the edge of the boulder, and lifted with all the strength that was in us. For a second it seemed that we could never budge it. Then it came up slowly; so slowly that I thought the muscles of my back would snap; and Mac's face, close by mine, grew red, and then purple, with the strain. But it moved, and presently a great heave turned it over. Bedded in the soft sand underneath lay the slim buckskin sacks. Our fingers, I remember, trembled a bit with eagerness as we stood one on end and loosened its mouth to look at the treasure for which the blood of two good men had been ruthlessly spilled.

"Here!" Mac handed me his carbine. "You stay with the filthy lucre. From now on we keep our eyes on this stuff, and likewise have our guns handy. I'll go and make those fellows pack up and bring the horses here. Then we'll load this truck and pull for Walsh."

His first move was to saddle his black horse and my dun. These he led to the fire; and thereafter stood a little to one side, placidly smoking, while the other two packed the camp outfit and saddled their own horses. Then they trailed across the flat to me, MacRae blandly in the rear. He wasn't taking any chances.

Half an hour later, with the sacks of gold lashed securely on the *aparejos* of the packhorse, we climbed out of Writing-Stone bottom and swung away across the silent table-lands.

Within gunshot of the painted rock an insignificant thing, the long-abandoned burrow of a worthless badger, betrayed us into the hands of our enemy. We had contrived that Gregory should lead the packhorse, which gave Mac and me both hands free in case of a hostile demonstration; that there would be such neither of us doubted

from the moment those two laid eyes on the buckskin sacks. The sidelong glance that passed from one to the other bade us beware. And henceforth the four of us were so many open powder-casks, lacking only a tiny spark to explode. We broke into a trot on reaching the level upland, Gregory a little in the lead, and Hicks sandwiched between MacRae and me.

We had them at a disadvantage—until Mac's horse planted his foreleg to the knee in an old badger-hole, hidden under a rank accumulation of grass. The black pitched forward so suddenly that MacRae had no time to swing clear; and, as he went down under the horse, Gregory's agile brain grasped the opportunity of the situation, and his gun flashed out of its scabbard.

My hand flew to mine as I jerked the dun up in his tracks, but I wasn't fast enough—and Hicks was too close. It was a trilogy of gun-drawing. Gregory pulled his, and fired at MacRae with the devilish quickness of a striking rattler; I drew with intent to get Mr. Gregory; and Hicks drew his, and slapped me over the head with it, even as my finger crooked on the trigger. My gun went off—I have a dim recollection of a faint bang!—but whether the bullet went up into the blue, or buried itself in the broad bosom of the Territory, I can't say.

Things ceased to happen, right then and there, so far as I was concerned. And I haven't figured yet why Hicks struck instead of shooting; unless he had learned the frontier lesson that a bullet in a vital spot doesn't *always* incapacitate a man for deadly gun-play, while a good whack on the head invariably does. It wasn't any scruple of mercy, for Hicks was as cold-blooded a brute as ever glanced down a gun-barrel.

When my powers of sight and hearing returned, MacRae was standing over me, nowise harmed. The black horse was stretched near-by. That was all; the two of us, and a dead horse lying on the sun-flooded prairie—and me with a rampant "morning-after" ache in my head.

I sat up, congratulating myself on being still in the flesh, but in a savage mood, for all that. "Well!" I burst out. "We lose again!"

"Yes," Mac returned impassively, "we lose again." Then he sat down suddenly and buried his face in his hands.

CHAPTER VIII.

OUTLAWED.

For a time I kept my mouth shut, having a keen sense of the mood he was in. For the second time he had, through no fault of his own, failed to live up to that tradition of the force which demands unqualified victory for a Mounted Policeman in a clash with the lawless. And, in addition, he had let slip through his fingers a fortune that belonged to a girl for whom he cared a lot more than he was willing to admit.

I felt pretty small and ashamed myself to think how easy they'd left us afoot on the bald prairies, after all our planning and precaution; and there was no responsibility on my shoulders—except for that ten thousand of LaPère's, which I was beginning to think I'd looked my last upon.

Mac had not only the knowledge of personal failure—bitter enough in itself—to consider, but the wrath of his domineering superior officers. It would have been a wonder if he hadn't felt blue.

He straightened up, however, in a little while, and abstractedly got out papers and tobacco.

"I suppose," he finally said, "that bunch will quit the country now. They've got their hands on a heap of money in the last ten days; all they'll have a chance at for some time. And, besides, they've given themselves away."

"Well, we know who they are, that's a cinch," I commented. "We're that much ahead. If the Mounted Police are half as good man-hunters as they're cracked up to be, they ought to round up that bunch in jig-time. Did the black hurt you any when he fell?"

"Bruised my leg some," he returned

laconically. Then in a minute: "If he hadn't caught me right under him, I'd have got action on those two. But the jar threw my six-shooter where I couldn't reach it, and the carbine was jammed under him. I guess Gregory thought he'd got me first shot. He would, too, only Crow threw up his head just as he fired, and got the bullet. They'd ducked into that coulée by the time I got clear. Hicks grabbed your horse and took him along. Blast them, anyway!"

"Same here, and more of it," I fervently exclaimed.

"Come on, let's get out of here," Mac said abruptly. "We'll have to head for Pend d'Oreille, and send word to Walsh. It'll take the whole force to catch them now."

My gun lay where it had fallen when Hicks whacked me over the head. I picked it up, replaced the empty cartridge, and shoved it back into my scabbard. Mac swung the carbine over his shoulder, and we started.

Thereafter we tramped silently across high, dry benches, slid and scrambled to the bottoms of an endless succession of coulées, and wearily climbed the heart-breaking banks that lay beyond. The cool morning wind died away; from behind the eastern ridges the sun reeled up on its appointed circle, glaring mercilessly upon us. Underfoot, the dry sod grew warm, then hot, till the soles of our boots became instruments of torture to feet that were galled aforetime by fruitless plodding around the Stone.

When you've grown up in the habit of mounting a horse for every distance over a hundred yards, a walk of forty undulating miles over a network of bald ridges and yawning coulées makes a man think that a sulfur-and-brimstone hereafter won't hold much discomfort that he hasn't sampled.

A cow-puncher in high-heeled riding-boots is handicapped for pedestrianism, both by training and inclination—and that scarred and wrinkled portion of the Northwest is a blamed poor strolling-ground for anybody.

But we kept on, for the simple reason that there was nothing else we could do. Mac had little to say. If the heat and the ungodly steepness of the hills and the sickly tasting water that ran lukewarm in the creek channels ruffled his temper he made no complaint, only pressed doggedly toward Pend d'Oreille. I imagine he thought me capable of registering a kick for both of us; and if I didn't live up to the opportunity it was the fault of my limited vocabulary.

I climbed each succeeding slope, oozing perspiration and profanity, and when the top was reached took fresh breath, and damned the Northwest by sections in a large, fluent manner of speech. In time, however, the foolishness of this came home to me, and I subsided into occasional growlings, reserving my wind for the miles yet to cover.

Well past noon we reached the summit of a saw-backed divide that overlooked the fantastic windings of the ancient, waterless bed of Lost River. The divide was studded with great outcroppings of sandstone; and in the shadow of one giant rock we lay down to rest; a man can't walk on and on forever. The cool earth was good to stretch upon, and for upward of an hour we defied the glowing sun and eased our aching feet. Then we started again.

As we stepped from behind the rock, three riders came into sight on the opposite bank of Lost River. A moment's scrutiny made us sure that they were Mounted Policemen. From force of habit our eyes swept the horizon; and within a radius of six miles we observed three other groups of two and three mounted men, an equal distance apart, and all traveling in the same direction—like a round-up sweeping a cow-country.

"They're next to something, Sarge," Mac asserted confidently. "And, seeing this bunch is heading right toward us, we might as well sit here till they come up."

Returning to the cool shadow, we waited until they crossed the sandy course of the dead and gone river and rode up the ridge. And when they came

within shouting distance we stepped into the sunlight and hailed them.

From the moment that they yanked up their horses at Mac's call, I had an odd sense of impending trouble. For an instant it seemed as if they were about to break for cover; and, when they did approach us, there was a wariness in their actions, a strained, expectant expression on each brown face that didn't look natural to me. Somehow I felt keyed up for an emergency. I can't explain why; any more than I could analyze the sixth sense that warns a good night-herder of a stampede before his herd jumps off the bedground. But I felt that way, just the same; and it immediately transpired that there was a reason.

They stopped their horses within ten feet of us, and dismounted, all three of them, a corporal and two privates, in the same breath that we said "Hello!" The corporal, chalky-white under his tan, took two steps forward, and laid a hand on MacRae's shoulder.

"Gordon MacRae and Sarge Flood, in the queen's name, I arrest you for the robbery of Paymaster Ingstram on the MacLeod trail, and the murder of two of his escort at the same time, and I warn you that anything you may say will be used against you."

He poured it out without pause or inflection, like a lesson well learned, and the two troopers came a little nearer, the right hand of each man stealing to the six-shooter that rested on his hip. When you come to think of it, they showed good nerve. If we had been guilty of that raid, it was dollars to doughnuts that we'd resist arrest; and according to Territorial law and the regulations of the force they had to take a long chance. A Mounted Policeman can't use his gun except in self-defense. He isn't supposed to smoke up a fugitive unless the fugitive begins to throw lead his way—which code of behavior gives a man on to the dodge a whole lot the best of it.

The idea is that the majesty of the law is a sufficiently powerful weapon; and in the main it is. No outlaw ever yet successfully and systematically defied it. Men have gone to the bad up there; robbed, smuggled, murdered, killed a policeman or two, maybe, but in the end were gathered in by "the riders of the plains," and dealt with according to their just deserts. So that throughout the length and breadth of the Northwest it has come to pass that "in the queen's name," out of the mouth of a weaponless redcoat, with one hand lightly on your shoulder, carries more weight than a smoking gun.

None of this occurred to me just then. The one thing that loomed big in my mind's eye was the monstrous injustice of the accusation. Coming right on top of what I'd lately suffered at the hands of the men who had really done that dirty job—for my head still tingled from the impact of Hicks' pistol—it stirred up all the ugliness I was capable of, and a lot that I'd never suspected. No Fort Walsh guard-house for me! No lying behind barred windows, with my feet chain-hobbled like a straying horse, waiting for the slow-moving Canadian courts to establish my innocence! Not while I had the open prairie underfoot and the summer sky above, and fingers to wield a club or pull a trigger.

I think even if I'd been alone I was crazy enough, right then, to have gone single-handed against the three of them. In which case I should probably have bidden a premature farewell to earthly interests—though I would doubtless have managed to take a policeman or two for company on the long trail. But the grim look that flashed over MacRae's face, and a suggestive tightening of his mouth, gave me a hint that something of the same was in his mind, and touched me off.

I jumped for the two buck troopers with a hazy idea that I could put both of them out of business while MacRae attended to the corporal. The distance didn't permit of gun-play; and, anyway, hot as I was, I didn't want to kill *them* if I could help it—what I desired, above all else, was to get away, and a chance to burn powder with Hicks, Gregory & Co., if powder-burning was to be the order of the day. They did try to pull

their guns, but I beat them to it by kicking one with all the force I could muster, and throwing my arms in a fervent embrace about the neck of the other.

A number eight, box-toed riding-boot planted forcibly in the pit of your stomach is equivalent to being kicked by a vigorous Missouri mule, I should imagine; anyway, that Mounted Policeman was eliminated as a fighting unit from the moment I made connections with him. The other fellow and I went to the ground, and our struggle was of short duration, for Mac bought into the game, with his carbine for a club, and under its soothing touch my wiry opponent ceased from troubling. I scrambled thankfully to my feet and looked around. The corporal was sprawled on the grass, his face to the sky.

"We've burned our bridges, now, sure as fate," Mac broke out. "Here! I'll peel the guns off the bunch, and you lead the horses up to the rock, out of sight of these other fellows, or they'll be swinging over this way to see what's up."

I led the horses close to the boulder, and left them standing. By then the fellow I'd kicked had so far recovered as to sit up, and the look he gave us was a scorcher. Mac, with cocked carbine to emphasize his command, ordered him to drag his comrade to where the horses stood, and I followed after, lugging the insensible corporal to the same shady place.

"Now, I want to know the how of this," Mac demanded of the trooper. "Who issued orders for our arrest on this damn' fool charge? And when?"

"Lessard," the policeman sullenly growled. "He's been out with a whole bloomin' troop ever since the paymaster was stuck up. He's got a commissary along, an' we had dinner about ten miles east o' here. After dinner—about two or three hours ago—he lined us up an' said as how he'd got word that one o' the men that was shot up bad in the paymaster row had come alive long enough to describe an' identify two o' the hold-ups, an' they was you two. Said he had reason to believe you was somewhere between Lost River an' the Stone, an' you was to be captured without fail. An' that's all I know about it," he concluded frankly, "except that you fellers are bloody fools to make a break like this. It'll just go that much harder with you—there ain't a bloomin' chance for you to get away. You might just as well give up peaceable."

"Oh, don't preach," MacRae protested. "I know all that as well as anybody. You've known me, Burky, ever since I joined the force. Do you honestly believe I was in on that hold-up?"

"Orders is orders," Burky sententiously observed. "Headquarters sez you're to be took in, an' you'll be took in no matter what a feller's private opinion may be. I ain't no bloomin' judge an' jury to set on your case. You'll get a square trial—you know that. But you ain't helpin' yourself a-cuttin' up this way."

"I haven't time to go into details," Mac calmly answered. "And I don't suppose you'd believe me if I did. I've a blamed good reason for not wanting to put in six months or so in the guardhouse, while the men that got the stuff get clear out of the country. We're going to take two of these horses, because we need them in our business; and we'll leave your guns at that big rock over yonder. I don't want to hurt you, Burky, but if you start making signals to the rest of your bunch before we get out of sight, you'll go back to Walsh feet first."

With the bridle-reins in his hand, Mac fired another question at Burky. "Say, did you see anything of Frank Hicks or Paul Gregory to-day?"

"They was in camp when I come for dinner," the trooper replied.

"Oh, they were, eh!" Mac blazed. "Well, you can tell your blasted officers, when you see them, that they'll find the men they want nearer home!"

We mounted the two best horses, and took the other along as a precautionary measure. At the next boulder down the ridge we left him, together with their belts and guns, as Mac had promised. For the next two hours we slunk like

coyotes along coulée bottoms and deep washouts, until we saw the commissary-wagon cross the ridge west of Lost River; saw from a distance the brown specks, that were riders, casting in wide circles for sight of us or our trail.

MacRae pulled up and stared back at them a minute, leaning over the saddle-horn.

"Somewhere within twenty-five miles of us," he said, more to himself than to me, "there's a hundred and fifty thousand dollars of stolen money cached in the hills. And the men that put it there are hunting us like we were wild beasts."

He straightened up and regarded me gravely. "We're outlawed, Sarge," he said. "They fight fire with fire in a grass-country. Will you go through with me?"

"All the way and back again," I vowed recklessly. I didn't know what he had in mind, but I knew *him,* and we were in the same boat.

"Good! We'll come out on top yet." That was all he said, then headed his horse due south for Stony Crossing.

CHAPTER IX.

AN UNEXPECTED MEETING.

Without further speech we rode up hill and down, keeping a watchful eye for signs of being followed. The farther we traveled the more curious did I become as to Mac's line of action. I'd just reached the point of asking outright, when he forestalled me.

"This is going to be risky business, Sarge," he began abruptly. "But it's the only way I can think of that we stand a chance to play even. If we can get hold of Hicks or Gregory, Goodell or Bevans, any one of the four, we can *make* him tell us all we want to know. Once we get our hands on that plunder, I'll guarantee it goes to Fort Walsh without any further monkey business. So it's up to us to hang on the flank of these man-hunters and waylay one of that red-handed quartet, But first thing we've got to have grub."

"Where'll you get it?" I wanted to know.

"From Baker's freight outfit," he returned hopefully. "I was talking with their wagon-boss the day I left Walsh, and from what he told me, they ought to be camped to-night on the first water north of Stony Crossing. We can make their camp by sundown, I reckon, stay there overnight, and in the morning pull out with enough flour and coffee to hold us while we drift around on the trail of that troop."

"Sounds good to me," I assented. "It isn't likely they'll know we're on the dodge; and if they did, they'd help us just the same."

As Mac had calculated the Baker freight-train was camped at a big spring ten miles north of the Crossing. It was a mighty good thing for us that Mac knew just where to find them, or we might have ridden our horses to a standstill in a vain search. We didn't make it by sundown; and with the coming of dusk a roaring wind piled layer on layer of scudding, dirty-gray clouds into a lowering mass above, and night shut down black as the bottomless pit, a seventy-mile breeze lashing us spitefully, and deep-tongued thunder growling overhead.

We made the freight-camp, however, just as the storm cut loose its first volley of rain. Our horses we picketed close by the circle of wagons—where we could get to them quickly should any of Lessard's troop happen into the camp—and then proceeded to attack the supper Baker's accommodating cook prepared for us. As we filled our plates and squatted under the canvas that sheltered the cook's Dutch-oven layout, a man propped himself on elbow under the hind-end of the wagon, and shouted greeting to us. It was our friend of the whisky-keg episode, Piegan Smith.

"Hello, thar, you fellers!" he bellowed. (Piegan always spoke to a man at his elbow as if he were a hundred yards away.) "Say, yuh ain't been to Benton an' back again already, have yuh, Flood?"

"Faith, no," I owned, between mouth-

fuls. "And it's hard telling when I will get there. Have you gone into the freighting business, Piegan?"

"Not what yuh could notice, I ain't," he snorted. "Catch *me* freightin'! But I sold my outfit to a goggle-eyed pilgrim that has an idea buffalo-hides is prime all summer. An' so I'm headed for Benton to see if I kain't stir up a little excitement now an' then to pass away the time till the fall buffalo-run begins."

"You better come with us, Piegan," Mac put in dryly, "if excitement is what you're looking for. We'll introduce you to more different brands of it in the next few days than Benton could furnish in six months."

"Maybe," Piegan laughed. "But not the brand I'm lookin' for."

Mac was on the point of replying, when came a most unexpected interruption. I looked up at sound of a startled exclamation to behold the round African physog of Lyn Rowan's colored mammy. But she had no eyes for me; she stood like a black statue just within the firelight, a tin bucket in one hand, staring right over my head at MacRae.

"Lawd a-me!" she gulped out. "If Ah ain't sho'ly laid mah eyes on Marse Go'don. Is dat sho' 'nuff yo', wid yo' red coat an' all?"

"It sure is, mammy," Mac answered. "How does it happen you're traveling this way? I thought you were at Fort Walsh. Miss Lyn isn't along, is she?"

"She suttinly am. Yo' doan catch dis chile moseyin' ober dese yeah prairies by huh lonesome," Mammy Thomas emphatically asserted. "After dey done brought Miss Lyn's paw in an' planted him, she say dey ain't no use fo' huh to stay in dis yeah redcoat country no longer; so we-all packed up an' sta'ted fo' de lan' of de free."

Mac hastily swallowed the coffee in his cup, and tossed his eating-implements into the cook's wash-pan.

"I'll go with you, mammy," he told her. "I want to see Miss Lyn myself."

"Jes' a minute, Marse Go'don," she said. "Ah's got to git some wa'm watah f'om dis heah Mr. Cook."

The cook signaled her to help herself from the kettle that bubbled over the evening fire; and she filled her bucket and disappeared, chattering volubly, MacRae at her heels.

I finished my supper more deliberately. There was no occasion for me to gobble my food and rush off to see Lyn Rowan. MacRae, I suspected, would be inclined to monopolize her attention the rest of that evening. So I ate leisurely, and when done, crawled under the wagon alongside Piegan Smith, and gave myself up to cigarettes and meditation, while over a pipe Piegan expressed his unflattering opinion of the weather.

It was a rollicky night, beyond question; one that gave color to Piegan's prophecy that Milk River would be out of its banks if the storm held till morning, and I was duly thankful for the shelter Baker's camp afforded. A tarpaulin stretched from wheel to wheel of the wagon shut off the driving rain that fled in sheets before the whooping wind. The lightning-play was hidden behind the drifting cloud-bank, for no glint of it penetrated the gloom; but the cavernous thunder-bellow roared intermittently, and a fury of rain drove slantwise against sodden earth and creaking wagon-tops.

If the next two hours were as long in passing to MacRae and Lyn, as they seemed to me, they had time to dissect and discuss the mutual hopes and fears and errors of several lifetimes.

Piegan broke a long silence to remark sagely that if Mac was putting in all this time talking to that "yaller-headed gal" he was a plumb good one.

"They're old friends," I told him.

"She's mighty nice," Piegan observed. "I dunno's I'd know when to jar loose myself, if she didn't object to my company. But seein' we ain't in on it, we might as well get under the covers, eh?"

Piegan had a bulky roll of bedding under the wagon. Spread to its full width, it was ample for three ordinary men. We'd just got out of our boots

and were snuggling between the blankets, when Mac came slopping through the puddles that were fast gathering in every depression. He crawled under the wagon, shed some of his clothing, and got into bed. But he didn't lie down until he'd made a cigarette; and then, instead of going to sleep, began to talk to Piegan, asking what seemed to me a lot of unimportant questions. And so, listening to the monotonous patter of their voices and the steady drum of falling rain, I fell asleep.

In course of time I wakened again; speaking truthfully, the gentle voice of Piegan Smith enunciating, "Well, I'll be damned!" within twelve inches of my ear, brought me out of dreamland with a guilty start.

Mac was sitting up, and from his speech I gathered that he was recounting to Piegan the tale of adventures during the past week. I thought that queer, for Mac was usually a close-mouthed beggar; but there was no reason why he shouldn't proclaim it from the hilltops if he chose, so I rolled over and pulled the blankets around my head —to protect my ear-drums, if Piegan's astonishment should again find verbal expression.

The cook's battle-cry of "Grub *pi-i-i-ile!*" wakened me next. A line of red in the east betokened the birth of another day; a day born in elemental turmoil, for the fierce wind was no whit abated, nor the sullen, driving rain.

"I've enlisted a recruit," Mac told me in an undertone, as we ate breakfast. "It struck me that if we had somebody we could trust to go into that police camp and keep his mouth shut and his ears open, we might find out something; we could be sure that those fellows are still there."

"That was why you were making that talk to Piegan last night, was it?" I surmised. "Well, judging from his record, he'd be a whole team, if he's willing to take a chance." Which was perfectly true. Old Piegan was a boisterous, rough-and-ready mortal, but his heart was in the right place. He had the reputation, on both sides of the line, of loving to jump into a one-sided fight for the pure joy of evening up the odds. Also, though I didn't know it then, he had a grouch against Lessard, who had once upon a time kept him two long weeks in Walsh guard-house on suspicion of whisky-running.

"He's willing enough," Mac assured me. "Aside from the fact that any white man would go out of his way to help a girl like Lyn, there's the certainty that the government will be pretty generous to anybody who helps round up that bunch and restore the stolen money. Piegan snorted when I told him that we were on the dodge—that they tried to arrest us for holding up the paymaster. That's the rottenest part of the whole deal. I think—but thinking won't get us out of this jackpot!"

He stopped abruptly, and went on eating. By the time breakfast was over, the gray light of a bedraggled morning revealed tiny lakes in every hollow, and each coulée and washout a boiling creek of muddy water, with a promise of more to come in the murky cloud-drift that overcast the sky. The freight-train boss sent out a man to relieve the night-herder, and remarked philosophically: "More rain, more rest," and retired to shelter. His drivers sought cover in and under the wagons, where they had spent the night. But, though the mud and swollen streams might hold up the cumbrous freight-wagons, it did not follow that heavy going would delay the flitting of the thieves if they had planned such a move. So we saddled up and made ready to tackle the soaked prairies.

While we packed grub and bedding on Piegan's extra horse, Lyn came to us, wrapped from head to heel in a yellow slicker. By the way Mac greeted her I knew they'd bridged that gap of five years to their own satisfaction; and that she was loath to see him set out on a hazardous mission she presently made plain.

"Let it go, Gordon," she begged. "There's been too much bloodshed over that wretched gold already. Let them have it. I just know something dreadful will happen if you follow it up."

Mac smiled, and shook his head stubbornly. "I'm too deep in, little woman. If it was only a matter of your money, we could get along without it. But Sarge stands to lose a whole lot if we back up now; and I'd always be more or less on the dodge until it's cleared up. I've got to see it through. You wouldn't have me *sneak* out of this country, would you? There's too big an account to settle with those fellows, Lyn; I can't leave until the slate's clear."

"Oh, I know how you feel about it," she sighed. "But even if it comes out all right, you're still tied here. You know they won't let you go."

"Don't you worry about that," he comforted. "I'll cross that bridge fast enough when I come to it. You go on to Benton, like a good girl. I feel it in my bones that we'll have better luck from now on, and if we do, you'll see us before long."

Piegan was already mounted, watching us whimsically from under the dripping brim of his hat. I shook hands with Lyn, and swung into the saddle. And when Mac followed suit, we crowded through a gap in the circle of wagons, waved a last good-by, and rode away in the steadily falling rain.

CHAPTER X.

IN THE CAMP OF THE ENEMY.

From then till near noon we worked our passage, if ever men did. On the high benches it wasn't so bad, for the springy turf soaked up the moisture and held its firmness tolerably well. But every sloping bank meant a helter-skelter slide to its bottom, and either a bog-hole or swimming water when we got there; and getting up the opposite hill was like tackling a greased pole—except that there was no purse at the top to reward our perseverance. Across the gumbo lowlands great gobs of mud hung to the feet of our horses like so much glue, or opened up under hoof-pressure and swallowed them to the knees, so that our going was slow and wearisome.

About midday the storm changed gradually from unceasing downpour to squally outbursts, followed by banks of impenetrable fog that would shut down on us a few minutes, and then vanish like a bunch of good intentions; the wind switched a few points and settled to a steady gale, which lashed the spent clouds into hurrying ships of the air, scudding full sail before the droning breeze.

Before long little patches of blue began to peep warily through narrow spaces above; the wind-blown rain-makers lost their leaden hue, and became a soft pearl-gray, all fleecy white around the edges. Then a flood of warm sunshine poured through the widening rifts, and the whole rain-washed land lay around us like a great checker-board, whereon black cloud-shadows chased each other madly over prairies yellow with the June sun and green with fresh, upspringing grass.

That night we camped west of Lost River, lying prudently in a brush-grown coulée, for we were within sight of the police camp—by grace of a telescope in the hands of Piegan Smith. By sundown the ground had dried so that a horse could lift foot without raising an abnormal quantity of the Northwest along with it. The wind veered still farther into the west, blowing strong and warm, sucking greedily the surplus moisture from the saturated earth. So we held a council of war, and decided that, since the footing promised to be normal in the morning, the troop might scatter out, and it behooved us to get in touch with them at once; wherefore Piegan rode away to spend a night in the police camp, with a tale of horses strayed from Baker's outfit to account for his wandering. From where we were, he could make it by riding a little after dark.

"Gregory and Goodell, you know," Mac told him. "Hicks is tall—six feet, I reckon. A square-shouldered, good-looking brute, with light hair and steel-gray eyes, and a short, brown mustache. Bevans is a second edition of him, only not so tall by two or three inches. He has an ugly scar—a knife-cut—across

the back of his right hand; you'll know him by that if you see him. Lie round there in the morning, if you can manage it, till they start, and notice which way those fellows go. The sooner we get our hands on one or more of them, the better it will be for us. Of course, if anything out of the ordinary comes up, you'll have to use your own judgment. And we'll wait here, unless some of them jump us up."

"Right yuh are, old-timer," Piegan responded. "I'll do the best I can. An' you fellers better keep the glass. You can keep cases on anybody that shows up, before they get very close, with it. So-long!" and away he went.

When he was out of sight we built a tiny fire in the scrub—for it was twilight, at which time keen eyes are needed to detect either smoke or fire, except at close range—and cooked our supper. That done, we smothered what few embers remained, and laid us down to sleep. That wasn't much of a success, however; we put in most of the time reckoning up the chances for and against the success of our little expedition.

"It's a wonder," I mused, as the thought occurred to me, "that Lyn quit Walsh so soon. Why didn't she stay a while longer, and see if these famous preservers of the peace wouldn't manage to round up the men who killed her father? Why, hang it! she didn't even wait to see if you found that stuff at the Stone—and Lessard must have told her somebody had gone to look for it."

MacRae snapped out an oath in the darkness. "Lessard simply lost his head," he growled. "Blast him! he had the nerve to ask her to marry him. And he was so infernal insistent about it that she pulled out in self-defense. That's why she left so suddenly."

Well, I couldn't blame Lessard for that, so long as he acted the gentleman about it. In fact, it was to be expected of most any man who happened to be thrown in contact with Lyn Rowan for any length of time. I can't honestly lay claim to being immune myself; only my attack hadn't been virulent enough to make me indulge any false hopes. It wasn't a crime to care for a woman, but Mac naturally would be prejudiced in a case of that kind, which explained his profane mention of Lessard. I disliked that big, autocratic major, too, but it was pure instinctive antipathy on my part.

We dropped that subject like a hot potato. It was one that, so far, we had shied around. Moreover, it was beside the point to indulge in footless theory; we knew beyond doubt who had robbed us, and the first move in the tangle we sought to unravel was to lay hands on them, violently if necessary, and through them recover the stolen money. Only by that means could we hope to gain credible hearing, and when that was accomplished, whatever part Lessard had played would develop of itself.

By and by I dozed off, my brain weary of speculation, and from then till daylight I slept in five-minute snatches.

Dawn brought an access of caution, and we forbore building a fire. Our horses, which had grazed in the open all night, we saddled and tied out of sight in the brush. Then we ate a cold breakfast and betook ourselves to the nearest hilltop, where, screened by a huddle of rocks, we could watch for the coming of Piegan; and, incidentally, keep an eye on the redcoat camp, though the distance was too great, even with a glass, to observe their movements with any degree of certainty.

"They're not setting the earth afire looking for anybody," Mac reflected, when the sun was well started on its antemeridian journey, and there was still no sign of riders leaving the cluster of tents. "Ah, there they go."

A squad of mounted men, in close formation, so that their scarlet jackets stood out against the prairie green like a flame in the dark, rode away from the camp, halted on the first hill an instant, then scattered north, south, and west. After that there was no stir visible around the commissary-wagon.

"They're all going the other way, and they aren't going to move camp," MacRae murmured, one eye glued to the telescope end. "Now we ought to see Piegan pretty soon."

But it was some time ere we laid eyes on that gentleman. We didn't see him leave the camp—which occasioned us no worry, however, because a lone rider could easily get away from there unseen by us. Only when an hour had dragged by, and then another, did we begin to get anxious. I was lying on my back staring up at the sky, all sorts of possible misfortune looming large in my mind, when Mac, sweeping the hills with the telescope, grunted satisfaction, and I turned my head in time to see Piegan show on high ground a mile to the south of us.

"What's he doing off there?" I wondered. "Nobody's following him that he needs to ride plumb around us."

"He isn't riding for his health, you can gamble on that," Mac responded. "Anyway, you'll soon know; he's turning this way."

Piegan swung into the coulée on a fast lope, and we stole carefully down to meet him. In the brush by our horses Piegan seated himself tailor-fashion on the ground, and began to fill his pipe.

"First place," he said, "we're a little behind time. Your birds has took wing, an' flew the coop."

"Took wing—how, and when?" Mac demanded.

"You'll sabe better if I tell yuh how I made out," Piegan answered, after a pause to light his pipe. "They was 'most all in bed, asleep, when I got there last night. But this mornin' I got a show to size up the whole bunch, and nary one uh the jaspers I wanted to see was there. So I begins to quiz while we was eatin' breakfast, lettin' on I wanted t' see that Injun scout. One feller up an' tells me he guesses I'll find him at Fort Walsh. After a while I gets next to some more, and when I puts it all together, this here's the way she stacks up: Lessard pulls out with a pack outfit for Walsh that same afternoon you fellers set them three buck policemen afoot, takin' several men with him—Gregory in the bunch. An' accordin' to orders which he left behind, Goodell an' Hicks, an' another feller, which I guess is Bevans, most likely, takes another packadero layout an' starts yesterday afternoon, presumable for Medicine Lodge. An' that's all I found out from the policemen."

Mac swore, and commented: "We're just as far behind as ever."

"Hold your hosses!" Piegan grinned knowingly. "I said that's all I found out from the reds—but I did a little prognosticatin' on my own hook. I figured that if them three fellers hit the trail yesterday afternoon when that storm let up, they'd make a mighty good track in this sloppy goin'; an' I was curious to know if they lit straight for the Lodge. So when the bunch rides off, I quits the camp an' swings round in a half-circle, an', sure enough, finds their mark. Three riders an' two packhorses. Easy trackin'? Well, I should say! They'd cut a trail in them doby flats like a bunch uh runnin' buffalo. Say, where *is* Medicine Lodge?"

"Oh, break away, Piegan," Mac impatiently exclaimed. "What are you trying to get at? You know where Medicine Lodge is as well as I do."

"Sure I do," Piegan retorted spiritedly, a wicked twinkle in his shrewd old eyes. "But it must 'a' been moved lately, for them fellers rode north a ways, an' then turned square around and struck southwest. I followed their trail out here to where yuh seen me turn this way—if yuh was watchin'. Poor cusses!" Piegan grinned broadly while he voiced this mock sympathy. "They're lost, I reckon. It really ain't safe for 'em to be cavorting over the prairie with all that boodle. I reckon we'll just naturally have to foller their trail an' take it away from 'em. They ain't got such a rip-roarin' start of us—an' I'm the boy can foller that track from hell to breakfast! So straddle them *caballos* an' come on."

CHAPTER XI.

A MASTER-STROKE OF VILLANY.

Piegan made no vain boast when he asserted his ability to follow that trio of thieves. A lifetime on the plains

had made him own brother to the Indian in the matter of nosing out dim trails. The crushing of a tuft of grass, a broken twig, all the half-hidden signs the feet of horses and men leave behind, held a message for him; nothing escaped his eagle eye; and he did it half-consciously, without an effort. The surpassing skill of it didn't strike me so forcibly at first, for I can read an open trail as well as the average cowman, and the mark of their passing lay plain before us; the veriest pilgrim, new come from graded roads and fenced pastures, could have counted the number of their steps—each hoof had stamped its impression indelibly in the soft loam as clearly as a steel die-cut in soaked leather. But that was where they had ridden while the land was still plastic from the rain; farther, wind and sun had dried the ridge turf to its normal firmness, and baked the doby flats flint hard; yet Piegan crossed at a lope places where neither MacRae nor I could glimpse a sign—and when we would came again to soft ground, the trail of the three rose up to confront us, and bid us marvel at the keenness of his vision.

We followed in the wake of Piegan Smith with what speed the coulée-gashed prairie permitted; and about one or two o'clock halted to eat a bite and let our horses graze. Within ten minutes of starting again we dipped into a cañon, and came on the place where the three had made their first camp—a little patch of dead ashes, a few half-burned sticks, and the close-picked grass where each horse had circled a picket-pin.

There was little to see. Little, at least, that I could see, beyond dim tracks leading away from the spot. These we had followed but a hundred yards when Piegan pulled up with an exclamation.

"Blamed if they hain't got company, from the looks uh things!" he grunted, squinting at the ground. "You fellers wait here a minute. I want to see which way them other tracks come in."

He loped back, swinging in north of the camp-ground. While he was gone Mac and I leaned over in our saddles and scanned carefully the grass-carpeted bottom-land. That the hoofs of passing horses had beaten down the heavy, damp grass was plain enough, but whether the hoofs of five or ten we could only guess. Piegan turned, rode to and around where the fire had been, then back to us.

"All right, fellers," he said. "I was sure there was more live stock left that campin'-place than we follered in. They come from the north—four hosses, two uh them rode an' the other two led, I think, from the way they weaved around a-crossin' a washout back yonder."

A mile or so farther we crossed a bare, sandy stretch on the flat bottom of another coulée, and on its receptive surface the trail lay like a printed page—nine distinct, separate horse-tracks.

"Five riders an' four extra hosses, if I ain't read the sign wrong," Piegan remarked casually. "Say, we'll have our hands full if we bump into this bunch unexpected, eh?"

"We'll take a chance," Mac answered grimly. "But we'll make it a surprise-party, if we can."

From there on Piegan set a pace that taxed our horses' mettle—we were well-mounted, that was one consolation, all three of us good for a hundred-mile jaunt between sun and sun, if it came to a show-down. He kept the trail with the careless ease of time-tried confidence, head cocked on one side like a saucy meadow-lark, and whistling snatches of "Hell Among the Yearlin's" as though the prospect of a brush with outlaws was pleasing in the extreme.

The afternoon was on its last lap when we came in sight of Stony Crossing. Along the crest of a ridge, midway between Stony Crossing and Ten-mile Spring, where we left Baker's outfit that rainy morning, the trail we followed wound deviously. The mud and high water had held the freighters, for we could see the white-sheeted wagons and a blur of cattle by the cottonwood grove where Hank Rowan made his last stand. MacRae eyed

wistfully the distant wagons when they came in sight.

On a line between the Crossing and the Spring Piegan pulled up again; and this time the cause of his halting required no explanation. The bunch had stopped, as the jumbled hoof-marks bore witness, and the trail of two horses led away toward Ten-mile Spring.

"Darn it all!" Piegan grumbled. "Now what d'yuh reckon's the meanin' uh that? Them two has lit straight for Baker's layout. What for?"

"Well"—Mac thought a moment—"that's hard to tell. But if there was anything they wanted, they weren't taking any risk to go in there, you know. They've worked it pretty smooth all round. We're the only men in the country that know why they're pulling out like this—and they know that we daren't go in and report it; because they've managed to put us on the dodge. They know headquarters wouldn't listen to a yarn like we'd tell—they'd have time to get plumb to Mexico while we sucked our thumbs in the guard-house and the rest of the police force got wise by degrees.

"I'll tell you what we'd better do: one of us head in for the Crossing, and find out for sure if any of those fellows came to the outfit, and what they wanted, and who they were. And, seeing you're not known to be in on this play, Piegan, you'd better go. There might be a stray trooper in that camp, and the same would be mighty awkward for one of us. Sarge and I can nose along this trail slow, and you can easily catch up."

"It's a go with me," Piegan agreed, and departed for the Crossing.

Thenceforth we rode at a walk; and even at that it was hard enough to follow the faint impression. In the course of an hour a cluster of black specks appeared on the high benchland, coming rapidly our way. MacRae brought the telescope to bear on them at once, for there was always the chance of Mounted Policemen cutting in on *our* trail; by this time the riders of every post along the line undoubtedly were on the watch for us.

"It's Piegan and another fellow," Mac announced, after a brief survey. "And they're leading two horses—and they seem to be in a hurry."

We got off and waited for them, wondering what the extra horses might portend. They swung down to us on a run, and it needed no second glance at the face of Piegan Smith to tell me that he had met up with a fresh batch of trouble. His scraggly beard thrust forward aggressively, and his deep-set eyes fairly blazed between narrowed lids.

"Slap your saddles on them fresh hosses," he grated harshly from the back of a thick-chested, lean-flanked gray. "Let the others go—to hell if they want to!"

"What's up?" I asked sharply; and Mac flung the same query over one shoulder as he fumbled at the tight-drawn latigo-knot.

Piegan stood in his stirrups and raised a clenched fist; the seamed face of him went purple under its tan, and the words came out like the challenge of a range-bull.

"Them—them low-down —— —— has got your girl!" he roared.

The latigo dropped from MacRae's hand. "What!" He turned on Piegan with savage unbelief.

"I said it—I said it! Yuh heard me!" Piegan yelled. "At daylight this mornin'. That Hicks—short mustache an' yaller hair—he come to Baker's as they hooked up to leave the Spring. He give her a note, an' she dropped everything an' jumped on the hoss he brought with him an' rode away. They ain't seen hide nor hair uh her since. She was cryin' when she left. He said you fellers had been shot resistin' arrest, an' wanted to see her. Aw, hurry up! They ain't got but twelve hours start—an', by the Eternal, I'll smell 'em out in the dark!"

It struck me like a knife-thrust in the back; so devilish and unexpected, that for half a second I had the same half-sick feeling that came to me the night I stooped over Hans Rutter, and gasped with horror at what the fiends had done. Mac went white to the lips, but the full import of Piegan's message stunned

him to silence. The bare possibility of Lyn Rowan at the dubious mercy of those ruthless brutes was something that called for more than mere words. He hesitated only a moment, pulling nervously at the saddle-strings, then straightened up, and tore at the cinch fastening with fingers that trembled.

After that no one spoke. While Mac and I transferred our saddles to the Baker horses, Piegan swung down from his gray, and, opening the pack on the horse we led, took out a little bundle of flour and bacon and coffee, and tied it behind his saddle. A frying-pan and coffee-pot he tossed to me. Then we mounted and rode away, stripped down to fighting-trim, no packhorse to hamper our movements.

Of daylight there yet remained a scant two hours and a half by which we could hope to follow a trail. Piegan leaned over his saddle-horn, and took hills and hollows, wherever the trail led, with a rush that unrolled the miles behind us at a marvelous rate.

For a full hour we galloped silently, matching the speed of fresh, wiry horses against the dying day; no sound in all that wilderness of brown coulée-walls and gray-green prairie but the steady beat of hoofs and the purr of a rising breeze from the east. Then I became aware that Piegan, watching the ground through half-closed eyes, was talking over his shoulder. From riding a little behind, to give him room to trail, we urged our horses alongside.

"Them fellers at Baker's camp," he said, without looking up, "would 'a' come in a holy minute if there'd been hosses for 'em to ride. But they only had enough saddle-stock along to wrangle the bulls—an' I took three uh the best they had. An' three of us is plenty, anyhow. We kain't ride up on them fellers now, an' go t' shootin'. They're all together again. I seen, back aways, where them two tracks angled back from the Spring. They must 'a' laid up at that camp we passed till some time last night — seein' that damned Hicks come t' Baker's early this mornin'. An' if they didn't travel very fast to-day—which ain't likely, 'cause they probably think they're dead safe—there's just a chance that we'll hit 'em before dark, if we burn the earth. We're good for thirty miles before night covers up their track. Don't yuh worry none, old boy," he bellowed at MacRae. "Old Injun Smith'll see yuh through! God! I could 'a' cried m'self when I hit that camp; an' that old nigger woman went t' bawlin' when I told her yuh was both out on the bench as sound as a dollar. That was the first they suspicioned anythin' was wrong. Them dirty, low-lived——!"

Piegan lapsed into a string of curses. MacRae, hard-eyed, his mouth twitching a bit, nodded comprehension. I knew what he was thinking.

We swept down a long slope with the red sunset at our backs and a gale of dry, warm wind, tainted with the smell of burning grass, blowing strongly in our faces. And at the bottom of the slope, in the depths of a high-walled coulée, where the evening shadows were mustering for their stealthy raid on the gilded uplands, we circled a grove of rustling poplars, and jerked our horses back on their haunches at sight of a scarlet blotch among the gloomy trees.

CHAPTER XII.

HONOR AMONG THIEVES.

We knew, even as our fingers closed mechanically on the six-shooters in our belts, that we hadn't come unawares on the men we wanted, or there would have been an exchange of leaden courtesies long before we managed to get in their immediate vicinity. It was unlikely that they would cease to exercise the cunning and watchfulness which had, so far, carried through with flying colors their infernal schemes. And a second glance showed that the scarlet coat belonged to a man who half-sat, half-lay on the ground, his shoulders braced against a fallen tree. We got off our horses and went cautiously in among the shadows.

"Be not afraid; it is I!" Goodell

raised his head with an effort, and greeted us mockingly. "I am, as you can see, hors de combat. What is your pleasure, gentlemen?"

The tone of him and the pallid features vouched for the truth of his statement. The light-colored shirt showing between the open lapels of his jacket was stained a telltale crimson, and the hand he held against his breast was dabbled and streaked with the blood that oozed slowly from under the pressing fingers; the leaf-mold under him was saturated with it.

"Where is the rest of the bunch?" MacRae asked him evenly. "You may be hurt, but that doesn't clear your skirts with us."

"You have a bone to pick with me, eh?" Goodell murmured. "Well, I don't blame you. But don't adopt the rôle of inquisitor—because I'm the same as a dead man, and dead men tell no tales. My mouth will be closed forever in a little while—and I can die as easily with it unopened. But if you'll get me a drink of water, and be decent about it, I will a tale unfold. I assure you it will be to your interest to give me a hearing."

Piegan strode out of the timber and unfastened the coffee-pot from my saddle; a series of pot-holes on the flat near-by lay brim-full from the recent rain.

It isn't in the average man to be utterly callous to the suffering of another. Notwithstanding the deviltry Goodell and his confederates had perpetrated, I couldn't help feeling sorry for him—what little I'd seen of him had been likable enough. I found it hard to look at him there and believe him guilty of murder, robbery, and kindred depredations. He was beyond reach of earthly justice, anyway; and one can't help forgiving much to a man who faces death with a smile.

"Are you in any pain, Goodell?" I asked.

"None whatever," he answered weakly. "But I'm a goner, for all that. I have a very neat knife-thrust in the back. Also he shot me twice—through the lungs. You see in me," he drawled, "a victim of chivalry. I have played for big stakes; I've robbed gaily, and killed a man or two in the way of fighting; all of which sits lightly on my conscience, even though my chickens have come home to roost. But there are two things I wish you to remember distinctly: I have *not* made war on a woman—nor tortured a wounded old man."

"You mean Rutter?" Mac squatted beside him, and leaned forward eagerly. Piegan returned with the water as Goodell started to reply. He swallowed thirstily, took breath, and went on:

"Yes, I mean Rutter. I'll tell you quick, for I may not last long, and when I'm done you'll know where to look for them. I started this thing—the hold-up business—no matter why. Lessard was in the hole, gambling—I hinted the idea to him; he jumped at it, as I thought he would. And——"

"Lessard!" I interrupted. "Is he in on this?"

"Is he in on it!" Goodell echoed. "He is the whole thing."

Well, I had suspected as much, but it was a surprise to have my suspicions confirmed. I glanced at Mac and Piegan.

"I was sure of it all along," Mac answered my unspoken thought. Piegan merely shrugged his shoulders.

"I wanted to get that government money in the pay-wagon, that was all—at first," Goodell continued. "We planned a long time ahead. Then he found out about those two old miners, and put his men on their trail. I had no hand in that. You know the result—the finish—that night you lost the ten thousand—that was hellish work. I wanted to kill Hicks and Gregory when they boasted of it to me. Lessard put Bevans on your trail. He followed you from Walsh, and you played into his hands when you stirred up the fire that night. Only for running into his partners he might have murdered you for that money. Give me another—drink."

I lifted the can to his lips again, and he thanked me courteously.

"Then we got the paymaster—and Lessard conceived the theory that you knew more than you told, and sent you

to the Stone with those two to keep cases on you. It seemed a pity to let slip that gold-dust after they had gone so far. You know how that panned out. We had a stake then. Lessard looted the post funds when he left the last time. We have—or, rather, *they* have," he corrected, "about two hundred thousand altogether. Lessard, on account of his position, was the brains—we did the work. We planned, at first, to make a clean-up, divide with him, and get out of the country—while he used his authority to throw them off the track. Then the girl appeared, and Lessard lost his head. She turned him down; and he upset our plans by deciding to cut loose from the force and go with us. I believe now that he hatched this latest scheme when she refused him. I tell you he was fairly mad about her.

"We couldn't ford Milk River on account of the storm. You tracked us? You saw our last camp? Yes! Well, we left there at midnight. And when Hicks turned off with an extra horse I thought nothing of it—it was perfectly safe, and we needed more matches. Not until he joined us later with the girl did I suspect that there were wheels within wheels; a kidnaping had never occurred to me. She realized that she had been hoodwinked, and appealed to Lessard. He laughed at her, and told her that he had abandoned modern methods of winning a wife, and gone back to the primitive mode.

"I have put myself beyond the pale; outlaw, thief, what you will; I am not sensitive to harsh names. But a woman—a good woman! I have my own ideas about such things. And when we camped here, I had made up my mind. I told Lessard she must go back. It was foolish. I should have gotten the drop and killed him without compunction. While I argued with him, Hicks stabbed me from behind; and as I fell Lessard shot me twice. Ah, well—it will be all the same a hundred years from now. But I'd like to put a spoke in their wheel for the sake of that blue-eyed girl.

"MacRae, you and Smith know the mouth of Sage Creek. They will camp there to-night. You can make it in three hours. From there they will follow Milk River to the Missouri, and catch a down-river boat. But you'll get them to-night. You must. Now give me another drink—and drift!"

"I believe you, Goodell." MacRae bent over him. "You're a white man, if you did get off wrong. I'll remember what you did—for her. Is there anything we can do for you?"

Goodell shook his head. "I tell you," he said, and turned his face to look wistfully up at the eastern coulée rim, all tinted with the blazing sunset, "I'll go out over the hills with the shadows. An hour—maybe two. It's my time. I've no complaint to make. All I want is a drink. You can do no good for a dead man; and the living are sorely in need of help. It'll be a bit lonesome, that's all."

"No message for anybody?" Mac persisted.

"No—yes!" The mocking, reckless tone crept into his voice again. "If you should have speech with Lessard before you put his light out, tell him I go to fix up things for him—a superheated grid! Now drift—*vamos*—hit the trail. The gorge at the mouth of Sage Creek. Good-by!"

Soberly we filed out from among the trees, now bending in the grip of the wind, their leafy boughs rustling sibilantly; as though the weird sisters whispered in the nodding branches that here was another thread full-spun and awaiting the keen shears. Soberly we swung to the saddle and rode slowly away, lest the quick beat of hoofs should bring a sudden pang of loneliness to the intrepid soul calmly awaiting death under the shivering trees. I think that one effort to right a wrong will more than wipe out the black score against him when the Book of Life is balanced.

A little way beyond the poplar grove Piegan drew rein, and held up one hand.

"Poor devil!" he muttered. "He's a-callin' us."

But he wasn't. He was fighting off

the lonesomeness, dying there in the falling dusk, with the wind whining overhead; singing to himself, as an Indian brave chants his death-song when the red flame of the torture-fire bites into his flesh.

Sing heigh, sing ho, for the Cavalier!
Sing heigh, sing ho, for the Crown.
Gentlemen all, turn out, turn out;
We'll keep these Roundheads down!
Down—down—down—down;
We'll ke—ep these Round—heads down!

Once—twice, the chorus of that old English royalist song rose up out of the grove. Then it died away, and we turned to go. And as we struck home the spurs, thinking of the mouth of Sage Creek and the dark that was closing down, a six-shooter barked sharply, back there among the trees.

I swung my horse around in his tracks, and raced him to the poplars with a lump in my throat. His big heart had failed him; maybe the shadows seemed too big and black to face longer, lying alone in that deep hollow in the earth; perhaps the night looked long and dreary, and he wanted to go out with the sun. He lay beside the fallen tree, quite dead, his eyes staring blankly at the darkening sky, and the six-shooter in his hand, as he had held it for the last time. I straightened his arms, and covered his face with the blood-stained coat, and left him to his long sleep. And Mac and Piegan lifted their hats, and whispered "Amen" in all sincerity as we turned away.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE MOUTH OF SAGE CREEK.

When we reached high ground again the twilight had faded to a thin streak of yellow-tinged gray in the northwest. The wind still blew squarely in our faces. Down in the coulée we hadn't noticed it so much, but now every breath was tainted with the rank smell of grass-smoke, and each mile we covered the stink of it grew stronger.

"We're blamed apt to run right into a prairie-fire before mornin'," Piegan observed. "If that wind don't let up she'll come a-whoopin'. It'll be a nice smoky one, too, with this mixture of old, dead grass an' the new growth springin' up. Ain't that a lalla of a smell?"

Neither of us answered, and he took to humming "The Texas Rangers." We were burrowing through the dark straight for the mouth of Sage Creek. What we would do when we got there was not very clear to me, and something of the same was evidently bothering Piegan, for, after a long interval, he addressed himself pointedly to MacRae.

"We ought to hit the river in about an hour," he said. "It's time we figured out just how we're goin' to work, eh? I wish to the Lord it was daylight!"

"So do I," MacRae responded moodily. "But wishing won't help any. I've been thinking that the best way would be to get down on the flat at the mouth of the creek and cache our horses in the timber. Then we can sneak around without making much noise. If they're not camped on the river—and I hardly think they'd cross to-night—we'll find them somewhere on the creek in that gorge."

"That's about the way I had her sized up," Piegan replied. "The flat ain't bigger'n a good-sized flapjack; an' if they're on that or up in the Sage Creek cañon we're bound to hear their hosses snort or nicker if we go careful. The worst of it is, we kain't start the ball a-rollin' till we get that little girl located. An' if we get rambunctious, an' stir 'em up in the dark, an' *don't* put the finishin'-touches to 'em right there—why, they got all the show in the world t' make a hot-foot getaway. Sabe? An', while I ain't lookin' for a chance t' side-step their game, for I know how yuh feel, I'd say locate 'em if we can, an' then back up an' wait for daylight."

The moon cleared the sky-line, a bright orange sphere in the thickening smoke. Away to the east the crimson-yellow reflection of burning prairies shot up plainly as we rode over the crest of a hill. And presently we gal-

loped across a mile of level grass-land, and pulled up on the very brink of Sage Creek cañon.

"Easy, easy, from here on." Piegan whispered caution. "We may be right above 'em, for all we know. We hit it a little too high up. How far d'yuh reckon it is t' the mouth, Mac?"

"Not more than half a mile," Mac returned. "I know a good place to get down."

Without mishap we reached the foot of that steep hill. At the bottom the wind was partly shut off, so that sounds were easier to catch. Nor was it so dark since the rising of the moon. Only the pall of smoke lay over everything; a shifting haze that made objects doubly hard to distinguish. A horse or a tree or a clump of brush loomed up fantastically in the gray blur.

MacRae, to whom the topography of that gloomy place was perfectly familiar, led the way. A black wall that rose suddenly before us resolved itself into a grove of trees, great three-foot cottonwoods. He stole into the heart of them, and satisfied himself that our game hadn't appropriated it as a camping-place; we tied our horses securely, removing saddles and bridles lest the clank of steel or creaking of leather betray our presence to listening ears. On any noise our horses might make we had no choice but to take a chance. Then we looked to our guns, and set out on a stealthy search.

A complete circle of that tiny bottom —it was only a shelf of sage-grown land, lying between the river-channel and the steep bank—profited us nothing; and Piegan whispered that they must have made camp in the gorge.

Cautiously we retraced our steps from the lower end of the flat, and turned into the narrow mouth of the cañon. We had no more than got fairly between the straight-up-and-down walls of it, than Piegan stopped us with a warning "S-sh." We squatted in the long grass and listened. Behind us, from the river, came a gentle plashing.

"Beaver," I hazarded.

"Too loud," Piegan murmured. "Let's go back an' see."

We reached the river-edge in time to see a dim shape glide out of sight among the scrub that lined the opposite bank; whether man or beast we could not tell. But Piegan turned on the instant and ran to where we had tied our horses. They stood quietly where we had left them.

"I just got an idea they'd got onto us, an' set us afoot as a starter," Piegan explained. "But I guess maybe that was some wild critter."

Once more we turned into the cañon, and this time followed its narrow, scrub-patched floor beyond sight of the river. It was dark enough for any kind of deviltry in that three-hundred-foot gash in the earth; smoke mingled with the natural gloom cast an impenetrable murk from wall to wall, and no breath of air stirred the tomblike stillness. Right in front of us a horse coughed sharply. We dropped on all fours, listened tensely a minute, then crept forward. Without warning we found ourselves foul of a picket-line, and the vague forms of grazing horses all around us. Piegan halted us with a touch, and we lay flat; then with our heads together he whispered softly:

"We must be right up on 'em. It's a cinch their camp ain't far from their live stock. I wonder——"

To the left of us a horse snorted nervously; we heard him trot to the end of his rope and snort again. Then a voice cut the quiet: "Here, you fool horse, what's the matter with you?"

We hugged the ground like frightened rabbits. It hardly seemed possible that we could be within speaking distance of them—yet that was Gregory's clear tones; I would know his speech in a jabberfest of several nations.

"What's the matter?" That, by the curt inflection, the autocratic tone, was Lessard. I had one hand on MacRae's shoulder, and I could feel the tremor that ran through him, like the rising of a cat's fur at sight of an adversary.

"Oh, nothing much," Gregory answered him carelessly. "I was just speaking to one of these fool horses. They're as nervous as you are." And we could hear him chuckle.

After that there was nothing but the muffled "tr-*up*, tr-*up*" of grazing horses. Piegan or Mac, I couldn't tell which, tugged gently at my arm, and the three of us retreated slowly. When we were well away from the camp of that ungodly combination, Piegan rose to his feet, and we proceeded a little faster until we reached a distance that permitted of low-toned conversation.

"Now," Piegan muttered, "we have 'em spotted. An' I'm here to declare that's it's plumb foolish to mix things with that layout till it's light enough t' shoot straight. If we go against 'em now, it's all same as goin' blindfolded into a barn to pick out the best hoss. The first gun that pops, they'll raise up an' quit the earth like a bunch uh antelope. *They* ain't got nothin' t' win in a fight. I did think uh tryin' t' get off with their hosses, but that sharp-eared cuss was watchin'. Whenever it comes day we got all the best of it—though I don't figure on a walkaway. We want t' make a clean job of it, an' we kain't do it in the dark. Furthermore, if we go to throwin' lead when we kain't see ten feet in front of us, ye'd just about hit that girl first rattle out uh the box. She ain't comin' t' no harm right now, or it wouldn't be so blamed peaceful around there. It's only a matter uh three or four hours till daylight. What d'yuh say?"

"Under the circumstances it's the only thing we can do," Mac breathed, and I fancied there was a quiver in his usually steady voice. "It's going to be smoky in the morning, but we can see their camp from this first point, I think. There's a big rock over here—I'll show you where it is—and you and Sarge can get under cover there. I'll lie up on the other side of the cañon. Let them pack and start. When they get nearly abreast of us cut loose. Shoot the horses, they ride first. Then, if they won't give up, we can fight it out. Come on; I'll show you that rock."

MacRae's bump of location was a good one. He picked his way through the sage-brush across the cañon, and brought us in the unnatural gloom to a great slab of sandstone that had fallen from above, and lay a few feet from the base of the sheer cañon wall—a natural breastwork, all ready to our hand. There, without another word, he left us.

Crouching in the shelter of that rock, it seemed as if we would never be released from the dusky embrace of night. In reality, it was less than three hours till day, but they were leaden-footed ones to me. Then dawn flung itself impetuously across the hills, and the naked rim of the cañon took form in a shifting veil of white smoke. Down in the depths gloom and shadows vanished together, and Piegan Smith and I peered over the top of our ambuscade and saw the outlaw camp—men and horses dim figures in the growing light. We scanned the opposite side for sight of MacRae, but he kept under cover.

"They're packin' up," Piegan murmured, chuckling dryly. "I reckon things won't tighten nor nothin' in a few minutes, eh? But I'm blamed if I can see anything that looks like a female in that bunch. Do you?"

I couldn't, thought it was less than two hundred yards to their camp. And failing to see her started me thinking that, after all, she might have given them the slip. I hoped it might be so. Lyn was no chicken-hearted weakling to sit down and weep unavailingly in time of peril. Bred on the range, on speaking terms with the turbulent frontier life, her wits weren't likely to forsake her in a situation of that kind.

While the daylight grew stronger, and the smoke settled thicker from above, one of them swung up on a horse and came down the bottom on a fast lope. We had no means of knowing what his mission might be, but I did know that the square shoulders, the lean, eagle face could only belong to one man; and I drew a bead on his horse's breast. I hesitated a second, squinting along the rifle-barrel; I wanted him to round the point that jutted out from the other side of the cañon, so that his partners could not see his finish. If they did not see him go down they might think he fired the shot himself. And, while I uttered

maledictions on the combination of circumstances that made it necessary to shoot even a thorough-going blackguard like Lessard, MacRae took things into his own hands, in his characteristic fashion.

Lessard turned the point, and, as the rifle-hammer clicked under the pull of my thumb, MacRae sprang to his feet from behind a squatty clump of sage. Nervy as men are made, MacRae worshiped at the shrine of an even break, a square deal. And Lessard got it. There among the sage-brush he got a fair chance for his life, according to the code of men who settle their differences at the business-end of a six-shooter. But it wasn't his hour. Piegan Smith and I saw his hand flash to his gun, saw it come to a level, heard Mac's pistol pop. It was a square deal —which he had not given us. He crumpled up in his saddle, sprawled a moment on the neck of his horse, and dropped to the ground. Mac sank behind the sage again, and we waited for the others.

CHAPTER XIV.

AN ELEMENTAL ALLY.

But they did not come. They must have seen Lessard fall, for at the single report, men and horses, already half-hidden by the smoke, vanished into the brush. Piegan did manage to fire one ineffectual shot as they flicked out of sight. We had got a fair look at them before then, however, and were satisfied that Lyn was not in the party.

"Darn 'em!" Piegan grunted disgustedly. "They're next now. An' they don't aim to run the gantlet till they have to. We got 'em penned, anyway; they can't get out uh that patch uh scrub without showin' themselves."

"Oh, Piegan!" Mac called to us. It was easy speaking distance to where he lay, and he yelled to us without showing himself.

"Hello!" Piegan answered.

"Can you fellows keep them from going up the cañon?"

"I reckon we can," Smith called back, "unless this smoke gets so thick we kain't see."

"All right. I'm going up on top, and throw it into them from above. Maybe I can drive them down where you can get a bead on them."

Piegan slapped me on the shoulder. "Darn our fool hearts!" he vociferated. "We ought to 'a' thought uh that before. Why, he can pick 'em off like blackbirds on a fence up there!"

We didn't see Mac go. He crawled through the sage-brush to the creek channel, where, by stooping, he could hardly be seen. Anyway, our time was fully occupied in watching the brush that sheltered our robber friends, lest they made a sneak before he could get above to head them off. They held close to their concealment, however; nor did they waste any powder on us—I don't think they could tell just where we were, and they were familiar enough with the gentle art of bushwhacking to realize that the open was a distinctly unhealthy place.

It was a long time till we heard from MacRae again, and, lying there passively, we grew afraid that, after all, they would get away from us; for the smoke was now rolling in black clouds above the gorge. So far the thickest of it had blown overhead, but any moment a change of wind might bring it down on us like an ocean fog, and that meant good-by to Hicks & Co.

"That fire must be mighty close," Piegan remarked. "I wish she'd let up long enough for us t' finish this job. That smoke's as good as they need, once it drifts down this coulée instead uh blowin' over. What in thunder d'yuh suppose Mac's doin' all this time? He ought to show pretty quick now."

He showed, as Piegan put it, very shortly. From the top of the opposite bank he fired three or four shots, and drew for the first time a return of the compliment from the enemy. Then he broke off abruptly, and when next he gave hint of his whereabouts, it was to call to us from the nearest point on the cañon rim.

"Quit your hide-out, and pull for the

mouth of the gorge. Quick! I'll meet you there."

We sprinted like a pair of quarter-horses across the twenty-five yards or so that was devoid of cover for a jack-rabbit, much less a man. My heart was pumping double-quick when we threw ourselves headlong among the welcome sage-brush—they had done their little old best to stop us, and some of those forty-four caliber humming-birds sang their confounded song perilously close to us. That's one kind of music for which I have a deep respect.

From there to the creek channel we crawled on all fours, as Mac had done. Stooping low, we splashed along in the shallow water, and reached the mouth of the cañon. There we slipped carefully to higher ground. Mac was scrambling and sliding down from above, dimly outlined against the bank. Up the creek choking clouds of rank smoke swirled down from the bench-land. Already the patch of brush in which lay the regenade policemen was hidden in its folds, shut away from our sight. We called to Mac, and he came crashing through sage and buckbrush, and threw himself, panting, on the ground by us.

"The fire!" he gasped. "It's coming down the gorge. They're cut off at the other end. They've got to come out here in a little while—or roast. The smoke would choke a salamander, on top, right now. We can't miss them in this narrow place, no matter how thick it gets. Look up yonder!"

A red haze licked its way up to the cañon edge on the east side, wiped out the grass, and died on the bare rim-rock. Away up the creek we could hear a faint crackle.

"Dry timber," Piegan muttered. "It'll get warm 'round here directly."

The smoke, blacker now, and hot as a whiff from a baker's oven, swooped down upon us in choking eddies; the high banks on either hand were barely visible. We could not see the blaze, but we knew that it wasn't far; the pop of dry, scrubby timber, and the infernal, suffocating vapors from the unholy mixture of green and dead grass, berry-bushes, and the ubiquitous sage told us that—and presently, above the subdued, menacing noises of the fire, the drum of running hoofs uprose.

They burst out the mouth of the cañon, headed for the protection of the river, like a smoke-wreathed whirlwind; the packhorses, necked together, galloping in the lead; and behind them Hicks, Gregory, and Bevans lay Indian fashion low along the necks of their mounts. They knew that we were waiting for them; but at the worst they had a fighting chance.

So thick hung the smoky veil, that they were right on top of us before they took visible shape; and, when we rose to our knees and fired, the crack of their guns mingled with that of our own. Gregory, so near that I could see every feature of his dark face, the glittering black eyes, the wide lips parted over white, even teeth, wilted in his saddle as they swept by. Bevans and his horse went down together. But Hicks the wily, a superb horseman, hung on his off stirrup and swerved his flying horse away from us, and the smoke closed in behind him, despite the bullets we sent his way.

It was done in less time than it takes to tell. Nothing spectacular about it; no half-hour hand-to-hand struggle with buckets of blood flowing in all directions, and a beautiful heroine wringing her hands in despair. Just a rush of horses and men out of the smoke, a sudden popping of guns—all over in twenty seconds. Only a couple of dead men, and Piegan Smith with a hole in his hat and another in his shoulder, to show there had been a fight.

The packhorses had circled around and tangled each other up, and finally stopped, when the riders ceased to guide them. Hicks was gone, and it was useless to seek for him. We turned our attention to Gregory and Bevans. Gregory was dead as the proverbial door-nail, but Bevans, on investigation, proved to be very much alive; so much so that if he hadn't been pinned to the ground by a thousand-pound horse he would undoubtedly have potted one or two of us with a good heart.

As it was, when we got to the gentleman, we found him making strenuous efforts to reach the carbine that had luckily—for us—fallen beyond length of his arm.

"Lay down there an' be good." Piegan, out of the fulness of his heart, emphasized his command with the toe of his boot. "Where's——"

"Here," MacRae broke in hastily. "We've got to move pretty *pronto,* and get on the other side of the river till that fire burns out. Sarge and I will gather up their horses; and you keep an eye on Bevans, Piegan. He'll answer questions fast enough when *I* get at him."

While Mac dashed up the creek I captured Gregory's horse, which had stopped when his rider fell, and as I laid hand on the reins I heard a shot down by the river. I listened a second, but heard no more. Then I went on to straighten out the tangle of pack-animals. Mac showed in the smoke haze with Lessard's body across his horse as I led the others back to where Piegan stood guard over Bevans.

"We haven't any time to spare," he said. "That fire'll be on top of us in five minutes."

It was only a minute's work to lash Gregory's body on one of the extra horses and release the sullen Bevans from the weight of his dead mount. As an afterthought, I opened the pockets on his saddle, and the first thing I discovered was a wad of paper money big enough to choke an ox. I hadn't time to investigate further, so I simply cut both *anqueros* off his saddle, and tied them on behind the cantle of my own—it seemed as if I had at last gotten a chance to shake hands with that ten thousand of LaPère's. Then Piegan and I drove Mr. Bevans ahead of us, and led the horses toward the river, while MacRae hurried to the cottonwood grove after our own neglected mounts; they'd given us too good service to let them go up in the general holocaust.

The smoke by now was stifling, and the purring crackle of burning brush sounded close enough to spur our steps if we'd been minded to lag. We made good time, however, and we didn't have far to go.

At the river brink Mac joined us, and we swung into our own saddles for the crossing. Bevans Mac ordered up on one of the packhorses. Thus mounted we pushed into the stream—none too soon, for showers of sparks were beginning to fall around us, and our breathing was a succession of coughs.

The river is about two hundred yards wide, and not quite swimming deep at the mouth of Sage Creek. We splashed out on a sandy point on the south side. Midway between the lapping water and the brush that lined the shelving bank a dark object loomed up in the smoke. We rode to it, and pulled up in amaze—it was Hicks, spraddled out on the sand, the length of his bridle-reins in front of his patiently waiting horse. I got down and looked him over. He wasn't dead, but he had a nasty mark; a bullet had scored his head deeply, just above one ear.

Mac got off, and we unbuckled his pistol-belt, and took the carbine from its sling on his saddle, and while I was making some kind of retort to Piegan's grim assertion that we better neck him to Bevans and throw them both in the river, somebody in the edge of the scrub cried, "Gordon! *Gordon!*" We saw through the shifting gray-white vapor the flutter of a skirt, and next minute Lyn, half-laughing, half-crying, was in MacRae's arms.

CHAPTER XV.

THE PIPE OF PEACE.

Maybe you think we weren't a happy bunch, gathered on that sand-bar in the drifting smoke-clouds—all of us, that is, except Bevans; and Hicks, when he came to his senses and found himself tied hard and fast to his partner. Lyn substantiated Goodell's story, and told us how, when they made camp in Sage Creek, she waited her chance, and, snatching a six-shooter, ran for it in the dark.

"I didn't really know where I was,"

she said. "So I thought I'd hide here till daylight, and watch them go. Then I could strike back for the freight outfit. I was hiding among those cottonwoods when you came there last night. You were so quiet about it I couldn't tell who you were. I thought, perhaps, they had moved their camp for some reason, and I was afraid they would find me—I never dreamed it was you. So I sneaked down to the river and crossed; I wasn't as much afraid of the water as I was of *them*. Then about daylight I heard shooting, and wondered if some one had followed them. I couldn't start with that fire coming, and the smoke so thick I couldn't tell north from south. I waited a while longer, and there was more shooting, and a minute or so after, he"—she pointed to Hicks—"came splashing into the river. He crossed, and was coming straight toward where I was hiding in the brush. I—I was so frightened—I shot at him, and he fell off his horse. Then you came, and—oh, it seems just like a nightmare! I'm afraid you'll all disappear in the smoke!"

"Not much, we won't," Mac assured her tenderly. "It *has* been a nightmare, but it's over now, thank the Lord."

The fire by this time was beating itself out on the opposite bank, and with nothing left but a few smoldering brush patches the smoke lifted somewhat, and gave us a glimpse of the black desolation behind. So far as we could see, the wind had blown no sparks over the river to fire the south side and drive us back to the barren shelter of the burned lands. And with the certain knowledge that we were all safe, and masters of the situation, came consciousness of hunger and great bodily weariness. It was nearly twenty-four hours since we had eaten, and we were simply ravenous.

We dressed Piegan's hurt, which wasn't as bad as it might have been; though a bullet through the fleshy part of the shoulder doesn't strike me as a joking affair, as Piegan seemed to think it. A little ventilation, he said, was one thing a man's system needed every little while.

Then we moved up on the grassy flat and picketed the horses. Piegan elected himself guard over the prisoners, while we cooked breakfast, and he assured them repeatedly that he would be delighted to have them make a break so that he could have the pleasure of perforating their individual and collective hides. The old rascal meant it, too; nothing would have given him greater joy. One arm out of commission was no handicap to him—he could juggle a six-shooter right or left equally well.

When we had eaten we went through the packs and saddle-pockets, and when we had finished there was more of the root of all evil in sight than I have laid my eyes on at any one time before or since. The gold that had drawn us into the game was there in the long buckskin sacks, a load for one horse. The government money, mostly in bills, they had divided, and it was stowed in various places. Lessard's saddle-pockets were crammed, and likewise those of Hicks and Gregory. Bevans' *anqueros*, which I had taken from his dead horse, yielded a goodly sum. Altogether, in bills and gold coin, we counted a hundred and twenty thousand dollars.

"There's more than that, if Lessard got off with any post funds, as Goodell told us," Mac commented. "I expect the pockets of the combination hold the rest. But I don't hanker to search a dead man, and the bunch of them can wait till we get to Walsh."

"Yuh goin' t' lug this coyote-bait t' Fort Walsh?" Piegan inquired. "I'd leave 'em right here, without the ceremony uh plantin'."

"So would I, as far as my personal feelings are concerned," Mac replied. "But we've got a lot of mighty black marks against us, right now, and we're going in there to relate a most amazing tale. I reckon we'll just have to take these two carcasses along as a sort of corroborative evidence. The police will have to view them officially; they wouldn't take our word for their being dead. So it would only delay the clearing up of things to leave them here. These other jaspers will lend a fine decorative effect to the noosed end of

a three-quarter-inch rope for their part in the play—unless Canadian justice miscarries, which doesn't often happen if you give it time enough to get at the root of things."

Much as we had accomplished, we weren't out of the woods—not by a long shot. While we didn't reckon on having to defend ourselves on the preposterous charge of holding up the paymaster, there was that little matter of violent assault on the persons of three uniformed representatives of Northwestern law — assault, indeed, with deadly weapons; also the forcible sequestration of government property in the shape of three horses and complete riding-rigs, and the uttering of threats; all of which was strictly against the peace and dignity of the crown, and the statutes made and provided.

A man is not supposed, in that country, at least, to find it necessary to inflict a compound fracture on one law in his efforts to preserve another. But we had justified our judgment in playing a lone hand, and upsetting Lessard's scheme to lay us by the heels while he and his gang got away with the plunder. We had broken up as hard a combination as ever matched itself against the red-coated keepers of the law; we had gathered in them and their loot, and for that we hoped the powers-that-be would overlook the break we made on Lost River ridge. And Lessard had burned his bridges recklessly when he decamped with post funds; that in itself would bear witness to the truth of our story. It might take the authorities a while to get the proper focus on the tangle, but we could stand that, seeing we'd won out.

From the mouth of Sage Creek to Fort Walsh it is even fifty miles. We had a long midsummer day to cover it. So, because we might find the full extent of it a fodderless, blackened waste, and partly for the sake of the three good horses we had ridden so unmercifully through the early hours of that night, we lay on the grassy river-bottom till the forenoon was half-gone. Then we packed our outfit, dead men and all, on the horses, mounted the sullen captives, with hands lashed securely behind their backs, and set out.

A half-hour before the sunset-gun woke the echoes along Battle Creek we rode quietly into Fort Walsh, and drew rein before the quarters of the officer of the day, tired, saddle-weary, and grimy with the ash of burned prairies. A score of troopers gazed curiously from a barrack corner. In the doorway stood Captain Stone, Lessard's brother-in-law. Behind him appeared a man, gray-haired and pleasant-faced, at sight of whom Mac straightened in his saddle with an exclamation and the military salute.

Stone stared in frank astonishment as MacRae got stiffly out of his saddle and helped Lyn to the ground. Then he opened his mouth to speak, but the gray-haired one silenced him with a gesture.

"Let MacRae explain voluntarily, Stone," he said.

"We have captured the men who robbed Flood, killed those two old miners, and held up the paymaster," Mac told them briefly. "And we have recovered all the money."

"What sort of cock-and-bull story is this?" Stone broke out angrily. "And why——"

"Easy—easy now, Stone!" the other remonstrated. "A man doesn't make a statement like that without some proof. Where," he asked MacRae abruptly, "is Major Lessard? Or do you know?"

Mac pointed to one of the horses. "You'll find what's left of the black-hearted devil under that canvas," he answered quietly. "We've packed him and Paul Gregory fifty miles for you to see. May I ask, as a favor, Commissioner Allen, that this lady be taken to Bat Perkins' wife? She has had a hard day. Then we can tell you a story you may find hard to credit."

The commissioner (head mogul of the Northwest Mounted Police, I knew by his title; I'd heard of him before) turned to an orderly. "A detail of four from the guard-house, on the double-quick," he commanded.

"These men, I take it, are prisoners?" he asked, pointing to Hicks and Bevans.

"Yuh bet your sweet life, Mr. Commissioner, them's prisoners," Piegan cut in cheerfully. "Them gentlemen is candidates for a rope necktie apiece—nice perfessional assassins t' have in the police!"

Stone stood gnawing his mustache, while Allen listened, unmoved, as MacRae pointed out to him the horse on which was packed the loot, and told him briefly of the fight at the mouth of Sage Creek. The orderly returned with the detail, and Allen courteously sent him to escort Lyn to the hospitable Perkins cabin; after which the troopers marshaled Piegan, Mac, and me, along with Hicks and Bevans, into the room where Mac and Lessard had clashed that memorable day. Then they carried in the two bodies, and afterward the pack that held Hank Rowan's gold and the government money.

I won't go into details of the inquisition that followed; how that calm, pleasant-voiced, shrewd old commissioner gathered his captains from their quarters for a semi-official investigation; how they put the lot of us on the rack of inquiry singly, while the rest of us waited in the anteroom under the vigilant eye of the detail from the guard-house.

The last act on that program came when a trooper searched the bodies of Lessard and Gregory, and forced Hicks and Bevans to shed the plunder they still had concealed about their persons, They counted the money solemnly on the same desk by which Lessard stood when Mac flung that hot challenge in his teeth; and when they had finished, Allen stood up, very tall and stern in the yellow lamplight.

"Take those men to the guard-house!" He pointed an accusing finger at Hicks and Bevans. "Iron them securely—securely!"

Then he turned politely to me. "I regret that it will be necessary for you to wait some little time, Flood, before your money can be restored to you. There will be certain formalities to be complied with, you understand. You will also be required as a witness at the forthcoming trial. We will be glad to furnish you and Smith with comfortable quarters until then. It is late, but MacRae knows these barracks, and he can doubtless find you a temporary sleeping-place. And, in conclusion, I wish to compliment you, all three of you, on the courage and resource you displayed in tracking down those damnable scoundrels—*damnable* scoundrels!"

The old fellow fairly exploded the last phrase. Then, as if he were half-ashamed of his burst of feeling, he dismissed us with a wave of his hand and a muttered "That's all for to-night."

That practically was the finish of the thing. They did, of course, have a trial, at which Hicks and Bevans were convicted and sentenced to be hanged—a sentence which was carried out with neatness and despatch. And I did manage, in the fulness of time, to deliver LaPère's ten thousand dollars without any further gun-play.

Commissioner Allen knew a good man when he saw one. He was all right, that gray-headed old soldier. When Mac appealed to him for an honorable discharge he calmly promoted him to an inspectorship; which same ranks with a captain, and carries pay of three thousand a year. Not so bad, that, eh? The day he shed the old red jacket of the rank and file, and put on the black uniform with gold-braid trimmings and shoulder-straps, Piegan Smith and I stood up before the post chaplain with him and Lyn, and helped them get fitted to double harness. Not that there was any lack of other folks. It seemed to me as if the official contingent of Fort Walsh had turned out en masse for that ceremony. But Piegan and I were the star guests.

Next day we forked our *caballos* and drifted for Montana, me to follow cow-trails instead of outlaws, and Piegan for a rip-roaring celebration in Benton. He entertained the town for a week, after he got there, telling how three of us "tamed a bunch uh wild ones" up north of the Canada line.

The Dead One

By A. M. Chisholm

Author of "Easy Money," "Where Friendship Ceases," Etc.

That the writer of humorous yarns is incapable of strong, serious writing is abundantly disproved by this characterful story. Mr. Chisholm has made us laugh many times by his quaint sketches in the "Popular." This time he makes us think, and gives us for study a man cast out as a "dead one," but with the old fighting spirit still very much alive.

(*A Complete Story*)

IN the second minute of the fifth round the lights were turned out for Tim McCune. It happened suddenly, as darkness follows the twist of an electric switch. Up to that fatal second minute he had been dimly conscious, through the rounds, of a packed mass of eager-eyed humanity rising tier on tier above him—a mass that howled many-throated, hoarsely, and primitively at each thud of a glove on the pink, hardened flesh. This was the background, "the house"; it persisted subconsciously, but did not force itself upon his notice, for more important matters pressed.

Closer, and deserving more attention, were three faces. These were at the level of his feet, and just outside the ropes. They moved and twitched as he feinted and stepped; they beamed when he landed a blow, and they gloomed and hissed sibilant, furtive advice when he failed to stop one; the gestures of their suddenly appearing arms were fraught with meaning. They were his handlers. He glanced at them often, as the mariner at the compass, but the glance was momentary.

What held his absorbed attention was the drawn, hard-lined face, with the expressionless but watchful eyes, boring into his own—the face that rocked back from a straight jab, and vanished as it ducked a swing or came over his shoulder in a clinch. If his handlers' gestures were a compass, those eyes were compass, chart, and barometer in one. To anticipate their suddenly declaring purpose was, just then, the most important thing in life. In them he could read the coming blow even before the trained muscles moved in response to the will. He blocked and ducked and stepped and swung, baffling the savage intent of those eyes.

Quite confident and happy was Tim McCune as his lithe body moved with the accuracy of the highly trained fighting machine. In twenty rounds, or fifteen, or ten, or it might be the next instant, his chance would come, and then there would be the swift, vicious, snakelike blow; the collapse of that other machine which fronted him; the beat of the referee's arm ticking off the seconds; the raised hand at the tenth beat, and the roar of the crowd at the knockout. He, Tim McCune, would be in line for the featherweight

championship; and there would be the purse and the side bet to collect. And just then darkness came.

When the blackness lifted, with many strange streaks of varied lights, which struck his throbbing eyeballs painfully, he was lying in a small room, and somebody was moving his arms up and down, while somebody else smothered him with a wet sponge. Confused, he staggered to his feet. Perhaps the ten seconds were not up. His hands lifted instinctively, but instead of the vicious little face he looked for, he beheld another—big, fleshy, masklike, clean-shaven, the remains of a chewed cigar clamped in a large, straight-drawn mouth, and he knew it for the face of Tip Purcell, his manager and backer. There came to his dulled brain recollection.

"What happened?" he cried, swaying as he stood. The cigar shifted in Purcell's mouth.

"Left hook," he said briefly. "You got it a-plenty. Keep quiet."

"I kin lick him," cried Tim McCune wildly. "He never knocked me out. He couldn't—not in a thousand years. Where is he? I'll take him without the gloves. I kin——"

"You shut up," said Purcell. He was a huge man, broad and thick, though not tall. Apparently he was grossly fat, and his face was the inscrutable mask of the gambler. "Lie down and keep quiet. When you've got your senses back we'll talk."

"But I kin lick him, Mr. Purcell—you know I kin. I been robbed, an' it's your fault. You stood for that referee——"

Purcell caught him by the wrist and shoulder, and twisted him back on the stretcher as easily as if he had been an infant. "That'll be all from you for a minute," he said. Then turning to the others: "You can beat it; I want a little talk with Tim."

Tim McCune lay on the stretcher where he had been thrown, and endeavored to arrange his ideas. The momentary confusion attendant upon the knockout had vanished, and he was as strong and active as when he had climbed through the ropes into the ring half an hour before. But then he had been a coming champion, unbeaten since he had emerged from the obscurity of vicious battles in cellars and on the lower decks of steamers for small purses into the dazzle of glaring lights and packed athletic clubs, that bid against each other for a contest in which he figured. The first taste of the bitterness of defeat was his, and he clenched his teeth at the memory of the newcomer who had launched him so swiftly from his pedestal. He sat up, pulling a bath-robe around his shoulders, and gazed at the floor sullenly.

Purcell stood before him, hands thrust deep in pockets. His face expressed no emotion whatever. "Well," he said judicially, "what have you got to say for yourself? I s'pose you know I'm out nearly ten thousand on this."

"I can't help it, Mr. Purcell," said Tim. "I done my best. I had him safe when he got to me." His left hand wandered to his chin mechanically. "I'll put him out next time."

"If there is a next time," said Purcell. "He'll say who he meets now, and not you. Just remember that. And who'll make a match for you, and pay your expenses and back you? D'ye think I will?"

Tim regarded him in astonishment, not unmixed with alarm. It was Purcell who had picked him up when he was unknown; who had guided him, managed him, and given him all the good things he knew. Tim had learned to look to him for money, advice, arrangements of all kinds. He had never considered the possibility of being discarded. The bare thought appalled him.

"Why—why, I dunno," he said. "I s'posed you would. I've made a lot of money for you; I never had a decision against me before."

Purcell's cigar shifted once more.

"It's like this, Tim. You've been fighting queer lately, and to-night was more than queer. You were slow—dead slow. Time and time again you had openings, but you didn't seem to see them; or, if you did, you

didn't use them. I want to know why. And in the fifth you left your jaw uncovered, and didn't try to stop him getting to you. And now it's up to you. I'm out good money, and you've got to show me I've had a run for it, see!"

"Mr. Purcell," said Tim earnestly, "if you mean I threw the fight, honest I didn't. You've seen me in dozens, and you never saw me quit or lay down or make a cent, except by winning. That's right—you know it is. When I was offered money, and big money, too, to throw to Killan, what'd I do? Told you, didn't I? And if I'd been offered money this time I'd have told you. The fight was on the level, and I couldn't help his putting me out."

Purcell took a turn or two about the room before he spoke. "I believe you, Tim. If I didn't——" His hand closed on McCune's arm. McCune shrank away. He knew the tremendous strength of the man, and that beneath the flabby-looking flesh lay bunches and layers and ropes of muscle. The fingers released their clasp, but the eyes burned into his. He shrank from them.

"No, you didn't throw it," said Purcell, satisfied with his inspection; "and you were trained to the minute—and that makes it all the worse. I've had my doubts about you for some time, and you've been going back steady. Looks to me like you were all in."

Tim's eyes opened wide. "All in!" he echoed. "Me? Why, I'm just as good as I ever was. You match me and see. Put me up against the best of them, and I'll win in ten rounds."

"Not me," said Purcell. "I've quit. I can't afford to manage fighters for my health. I took a chance to-night on there being one more fight left in you, and I was wrong. I've got no kick coming, but no more for mine. Get some other manager, if you can find one. If you can't, I may tell you that I've come to terms with this Kid Mulhall who just beat you, and I'll manage him in future. I can use you for a sparring partner for him, if you want the job. What do you say?"

Tim slowly took in the full meaning of the proposition, and his blue eyes filled with tears. This blow was harder than the knockout. It was a very soft and tender heart that beat in the little fellow's magnificent body; and all the hard knocks which had been his from birth had not toughened it. Purcell had set his feet on the upward rungs of the ladder, and the boy felt for him a doglike fidelity. Purcell was his good friend, and on him he depended entirely. While he had sufficient money for his own needs, he never inquired what became of his winnings, being satisfied to let Purcell look after them. Now, at his first defeat, he was coolly cast aside, and his conqueror installed in his place. It was very hard to bear.

"You—you might give me another chance," he said weakly. "I kin make good. I'll show you."

"I can't do it," said Purcell. "I believe you're a dead one, though you don't seem to know it. Will you take up my offer or not? It's the best I can do."

Tim McCune rose to his feet, and the moisture was gone from his eyes. "No," he said, "I won't. I'm as good as I ever was, and I'm not afraid of anything of my own weight, give or take ten pounds. I ain't goin' to be no trying-out horse for new fighters. I'm too good. I'll find a man to match me, all right; and if you put up your money against me you'll lose. Mind, I'm tellin' you you'll lose. You always treated me white, but you ain't doin' it now, and it's time I quit. You give me my money to-morrow, and I'll find some one else."

"Your money?" said Purcell. "That's the loser's end of to-night's purse, you mean, I guess. After your training and side bet comes out of it, there won't be much."

"That ain't all I've got coming to me!" cried Tim. "I been fighting for years, and you got the purses and the bets. I never asked for 'em, nor for anything but just what money I wanted to spend, and I want 'em now, see!"

"There's nothing coming to you," said Purcell quietly. "I've handed your share of everything over to you, as I

can prove. I hold your receipts for every cent."

"You're a liar!" cried Tim McCune fiercely. "I've signed anything you said, but I ain't had my share, and I want it. I want it quick, understand. Why, I ain't got ten dollars in the world outside what you have of mine!"

"Keep cool," said Purcell deliberately, but watching the boy keenly. "There's no money coming to you, and you might as well believe it now or later. You've had your share, and if you've blown it in, it's none of my business."

He expected an outbreak, but he was not prepared for the lightninglike spring and blow that followed. Tim McCune's fist struck him upon the mouth, and the big man staggered at the impact. And McCune, wild with fury, went for him silently and viciously. The bath-robe slipped away, and the little fighter, stripped to his ring costume, hit hard and fast. So furious was his attack, that Purcell for a moment could not protect himself. In that moment McCune's fists hammered his mouth, nose, and eyes; and smashed again and again on his jaw. And there was no lack of steam to the blows; they smashed home with the power of a kicking horse.

But Purcell, though dazed by the sudden attack, recovered himself. With a growl of rage he sprang forward, caught McCune by the throat, and shook him as a terrier shakes a rat. With his open hand he struck him again and again. McCune fought savagely, but he was powerless in that grasp. He was held forth at arm's length, and slowly choked until he fought for air only. And then Purcell threw him on the floor. He lay there, gasping.

"You little brute!" said Purcell, standing over him. "I've a good mind to wring your neck." His face was beginning to puff and discolor, and he passed a hand across it tenderly. "You'd scrap with me, would you? I might have given you something to help you out, but now you don't get a dollar. I'm done with you." He stared at the boy malignantly for a moment, and, turning on his heel, left the dressing-room.

Immediately the trainers and reporters swarmed in. In the confusion McCune got into his street clothes. Rumors were flying about. He had sold the fight; he had quarreled and fought with Purcell; he had retired from the ring for good. The reporters besought him for news—for a statement.

"I ain't talking now," he said. "The fight was square, and I was put out. Ain't that enough? Do I think the best man won? Ask Mulhall about it. If he thinks so, maybe he'd like another fight, and he can have it. That's all I've got to say."

II.

In the year following the fight with Mulhall, Tim McCune descended into the depths from which he had sprung. Investigation proved that Purcell held his receipts for large amounts, and his name was indorsed on paid checks in Purcell's possession. McCune had no definite idea of the amount of his claim, and could do nothing. He was almost penniless, and tried to make a match. In this he failed.

Two contradictory reports had got about. It was said that he had thrown the fight to Mulhall. It was also said —and apparently generally believed— that he was "all in" and a back number. McCune indignantly denied both reports, and asked a chance to disprove the latter.

The chance was long in being afforded him; but finally he found a man who was willing to give him a trial. The boy selected as a trial horse was working his way up from the ranks, and was fast and strong. He was eager to get a line on himself by standing up for six rounds against Tim McCune.

The trial came off in private, with only three persons present besides the contestants. The result was disastrous to McCune. Try as he would, he could not compass that perfect accord of will,

eye, hand, and foot which had been his. He was slow to take advantage of openings; slow to cover; slow to get away. He fought wildly, missing many good chances. The other boy, gaining confidence, began to carry the fight in. At the end of the sixth round there was no manner of doubt about the decision. Tim McCune had failed—signally failed—to make good. He knew it quite as well as Clancy, the veteran trainer who watched him.

"What's come to you I don't know," said Clancy. "If you can't do better than that you can't expect to get a match. I wouldn't have believed you'd gone back so far. There must be a good reason for it, Tim."

"What is it?" asked McCune dejectedly. "I feel all right, but I didn't know how dead rotten I was. Honest, I didn't. Purcell told me I was all in; and maybe he was right."

Clancy passed his hand over the hard, springy muscles, and looked into the clear eyes, and shook his head.

"It's not booze nor dope, and you're in first-class shape, though maybe a little overtrained. And yet you're slow as a beginner, and wild. Quick enough when you start a punch, and fast on your feet; but you do it too late. And you know the fighting game down to the ground, too. You ain't the boy you were, Tim. Better take a good rest, and try again."

It was well-meant advice, but Tim McCune, down to his last ten dollars, was not able to rest. Driven by necessity, he went on in a six-round bout at a smoking concert against a third-rater—and took a bad beating. Only his opponent's lack of hitting power and his own physique saved him from a knockout.

For days after that he moped in his room above a tough saloon. His money ran out, and he was forced to put on the gloves again. By chance at another smoker he was drawn against the boy who had used him as a chopping-block a week before. The third-rater was confident this time, and grinned as they shook hands. McCune expected nothing less than another beating, and faced it doggedly. But he was not beaten. Marvelously he found himself the old Tim McCune again. His eye, hand, and foot worked together. It was a bad three rounds for his opponent. At the end of that period he was knocked through the ropes, and refused to go on.

But this success was deceptive. A private bout was arranged with a boy of some local reputation. McCune's slowness was more apparent than ever, and he took another bad beating. He could not understand it. Why should he fight like a champion one day and be licked by a common dub a week later? He had no answer ready. He felt perfectly well, and his hitting power was undiminished; but his quickness was gone. As Clancy had said, he was slow in starting a blow, and equally slow in avoiding one.

After that fight he drifted steadily down. Those whom he had considered friends promptly forgot his existence. He frequented the lowest dives, and fought as he had fought years before—desperate battles in back rooms and on the lower decks of small steamers; sometimes winning, but more often losing; and always losing confidence in himself, and therefore parting with hope.

He began to drink a little. Liquor he had always avoided; but he found that it nerved him, and gave him temporary quickness and perception. And when defeated, it eased the sting of humiliation. At the end of six months he fought better half-drunk than sober; and it helped him to take punishment.

He deteriorated, as was inevitable. His skin lost its gloss, and his muscles their resilient hardness. His eyes grew dull, and into them came the hopeless, slinking look of the beaten animal. He herded with the outcasts of the city, male and female, after their kind. Regular exercise he abandoned entirely.

He was rapidly sinking into the criminal class. He consorted with sneak-thieves, shoplifters, and strong-arm men. Bull Hennessy, a notorious thug, took a fancy to him, and proposed that they work together. McCune re-

fused at first, then temporized, and finally agreed. But Hennessy was arrested, and the partnership was delayed; but only delayed. The bitterness of failure had entered his soul, and he hated mankind at large. But toward Purcell he felt especially bitter. The proceeds of his battles would have given him comfort; saved him from degradation. Purcell had those proceeds. Tim McCune vowed revenge, but felt the absolute futility of the vow.

III.

Tim McCune slouched along the wet pavement on his way to a certain saloon which would afford him supper, after which he was to fight in a cellar for a ten-dollar purse. His walk had led him into a district he seldom visited. He slunk along, hands thrust deep in pockets, hat tilted over his eyes, shoulders humped up; and he shuffled as he walked. There was absolutely no point of resemblance between this slinking, furtive-eyed young tough and the brisk, alert little Tim McCune, the fighting man of a year before.

It was almost dark, and beginning to rain. The few pedestrians were hurrying for shelter. McCune turned up his coat-collar, but did not quicken his pace; a wetting did not particularly matter to him.

A girl passed him quickly. Her head was bent beneath an umbrella, and a long, fawn raincoat wrapped her from head to feet. McCune, glancing at her indifferently in the gloom, saw that she was tall, slim, and rather pretty. He shuffled on, his eyes fixed on the ground.

From a cross street stepped two men of a type to be found in every city. One of them nudged the other at sight of the girl, and raised his hat. "Hello, sweetheart!" he said.

The girl bent her head, avoiding his gaze, and endeavored to pass. The man stepped in front of her.

"What's the hurry?" he asked, with a grin.

The girl stopped and looked him in the eye. "Kindly step aside and let me go on," she said.

McCune's footsteps shuffled nearer. The men looked, decided they had nothing to fear from him, and laughed. One of them threw his arm about the girl, and bent his face to hers. She struck him with her gloved hand, struggling to break loose.

This Tim McCune saw. He was no knight-errant, no rescuer of distressed damsels. His experience of petticoats in the slums was that they were very well able to look after themselves, and that any one interfering was apt to get hurt. But he had an utter and healthy contempt for the genus "masher"; and the girl was different from the girls of the slums. Her face was crimson, and she struck the man again in the face, putting all the power of her slim young body into an attempt to break his hold. Tim McCune decided that it was up to him. His shoulders straightened as he stepped forward, and he uttered the modern equivalent of "Unhand the maiden."

"Beat it, youse," he said.

Now, McCune was small and disreputable. He did not look formidable, though he did look tough; and the man holding the girl merely cursed him savagely, and told him to mind his own business.

The words were hardly out of his mouth when McCune hit him. It was not the wild, uncertain blow of the chance interferer, but the direct, purposeful, terrible "punch" of the professional fighter. It crashed on the man's jaw with every ounce of weight in the little body behind it, and he reeled before it, releasing the girl. The other man sprang at McCune, and struck him.

Then the whirlwind was loosed. Weakened and slowed by dissipation as he was, Tim McCune, what of many savage battles in which fouls were disregarded, feared no odds and no punishment. He smashed his right hand into the second man's face with the quickness and surety of a bullet, and followed it up with a volley of blows that ripped and broke through the

clumsy guard as through the futile arms of a child.

The first man joined in the fight, and was hit again and again. Holding them both, driving them before him, McCune fought like a little demon, swearing viciously as he struck. Every drop of fighting-blood in him was roused and clamoring for action; and the joy of the street fight gripped him like a live thing.

One of the men tripped and fell. McCune stamped over him; and the other turned to run. The man on the ground rose, gripping a stone. He threw it with accuracy. It landed on Tim's head, just above the ear, and the little fellow dropped his hands and sank without a sound in a crumpled heap.

For a moment the man stood startled at the effect of his missile. Then he turned and disappeared in the darkness on the heels of his companion. The girl ran forward and knelt beside McCune.

IV.

Mr. Joseph Ward stood on a corner and threw away the stump of his cigar. It was beginning to rain. Surely Rhoda was a long time in that confounded dressmaker's. He had been tramping around for half an hour, and he was getting tired of it. He turned and walked back in the direction from which he had come.

Ward was a young man with a love for sport, and a moderate fortune with which to indulge his tastes. Occasionally he dabbled in stocks; but he was averse to regular business. Himself an amateur athlete, who had won to the football-team and boat crew of his university, he had devoted most of his time to travel with sport in view. This life suited him entirely, until he made the acquaintance of Rhoda Carson; and then he became greatly dissatisfied with it. In due course they became engaged, and the date for their marriage was set. On the evening in question, Ward, acting as escort, had elected to stroll and smoke rather than kick his heels in the dressmaker's little reception-room while mysterious fittings took place.

As Ward turned a corner, the rays of a street-lamp fell on a familiar fawn raincoat. It bent above a figure on the ground. Ward leaped forward.

"What is it, Rhoda?" he asked anxiously. He knelt beside her, and turned the face of the unconscious man to the light. "Who is this little tough?"

"Oh, Joe! I'm so glad you're here!" cried Miss Carson. "Two men stopped me, and one tried to kiss me—the brute!" She shivered, trembling with the reaction. "This boy fought both of them till one hit him with a stone. It was perfectly splendid the way he fought. We must get a doctor for him at once."

"By George!" said Ward. "I shouldn't have left you alone. Here's a cab. Hi, there! Lift up his legs, cabby. Get in, Rhoda. To the hospital, I suppose?"

"Certainly not," said Miss Carson, with decision. "He was hurt defending me, and I'll take him home."

"But——" began Ward.

"I'm not going to be the newspaper heroine of a street row," said Miss Carson. "We'll get Doctor Steele in to look at him; and it will be better in every way, and a great deal quicker."

"All right," said Ward. He gave an address and jumped into the cab. In ten minutes it drew up before the Carson residence, and McCune, still unconscious, was laid upon a couch, while Ward, at the telephone, called for Doctor Steele's number.

"He's all right, or will be in half an hour," said Doctor Steele, after a hurried examination. "The first thing to do is to get him to bed. Good Lord, Ward!" he exclaimed, as he stripped away the patient's clothing, "here's physical development for you. There's a body to be proud of, if only it received ordinary care. Look at these deltoids and pectorals!" He prodded the muscles with an appreciative finger. "And look at the abdomen! Barred and ridged like a wash-board, by heavens! And see here for a forearm." He inserted a hypodermic

needle, and pressed the piston home. "No wonder he could scrap," he went on, as he sponged out the jagged cut in the scalp and began to clip away the hair from the edges. "I'll bet he's been in plenty of them. Hands show it. Most astonishing how these young toughs attain such physical perfection. They get it, somehow, in spite of every difficulty; and they abuse it, and die before middle age, as a rule. Now this boy——"

"What t'ell!" muttered Tim McCune, opening his eyes.

"He'd say that if he woke up in heaven," said Steele. "Lie still, my boy, till I fix up your head. Somebody took a small liberty with it." He adjusted the bandage deftly, and drove the retaining pin through the folds. "There you are, my son. Now drink this, and lie quiet for an hour or so, and then I'll give you more orders."

Tim McCune gulped down the brandy. It tingled pleasantly, and gave him strength. He put up a hand and felt the bandage.

"What's wrong wit' me head, doc?" he asked. "Did one of them guys slug me?"

"Slugged you with half a brick, I guess," said Steele. "You'd better keep quiet, sonny, for an hour or two."

"But where am I?" asked Tim. He sat up in bed suddenly, and stared around him. "I remember a scrap over a girl. How did I get here, and where is it?"

"You're in the girl's house," said Ward. "Her name is Miss Carson, and she's very grateful to you for your assistance, and so am I. When you're better we'll talk."

And so it came about that on the following day McCune sat in Ward's apartments, and told the story of his last big fight, Purcell's dishonesty, and his subsequent losing struggle.

"And he was right enough," he concluded sadly. "I'm a dead one, I guess. I'm slow, and I can't help it, and it's the toboggan for mine. There's no use my trying to keep at the fighting game; and I don't know anything else, Mr. Ward."

"I don't understand it," said Ward. "You were a top-notcher a year ago, and I believe you've got it in you yet. And now I'll tell you what I'll do. You've heard of Dave Walsh, of course? Yes. Well, I'll send you up to his place for a month or two, in which time I want you to do exactly as he says, and see how you shape. He knows more about building a man up than all the rest of them. Maybe you'll pull down some big purse yet, Tim. If not, I'll make it my business to see that you get something to do. Cheer up, my boy. You're a long way from being down and out yet."

V.

Dave Walsh was an ex-light-heavyweight; in his day the cleverest man within the squared circle. He lacked only the weight and stamina to become a champion. Threatened with a physical breakdown, he had left the ring and betaken himself to the mountains. His health was restored, but he knew that his fighting days were over. He built a large, comfortable house far up among the hills, fitted out a complete gymnasium, and established a combined sanatorium and training resort. He studied the human body carefully, even taking a partial medical course; and there was never a more thorough and painstaking student. Also, he had the advantage of practical knowledge. Especially he paid attention to anatomy, nerve disease, and diet; and when he came to put his evolved theories into operation, the results were sometimes marvelous.

In his first week at Walsh's, Tim McCune did nothing but rest, stroll along the mountain roads, and enjoy himself. Coming after a year of the slums and dives of the city, it was very like heaven to the boy. As the crisp air blew into his system and cleansed it, he felt his muscles bracing themselves to the tonic; and a tingle of energy stirred in him again. Once more he became alert, light-footed; of his own motion he began to exercise; and when Ward arrived at the end of a

fortnight the improvement was apparent.

"The boy is all right," said Walsh. "Of course, he hasn't been taking care of himself for the last year, but there's no great harm done; and physically he's a little wonder. I always thought he'd go to the top, but you never can tell. I haven't let him touch a glove so far; but we might as well see how he shapes, and what, if anything, is the matter with him.

"Now, Tim," said Walsh, when they stood facing each other in the gymnasium, "I want to see how you handle yourself, and where the trouble is. You say you're slow. I want to know how slow. We'll spar a little. Play light. Hit and get away, and cover as quick as you know how. Never mind anything but speed. Come to me, and come quick."

They felt each other out. Walsh led and connected several times. He blocked McCune's leads and returns with the greatest ease. Then he stopped.

"What's the matter?" he asked. "Let yourself go, can't you? You never fought like that in your life."

He led again, slowly. It was blocked accurately. Again McCune side-stepped it. "Hit me," said Walsh, "here on the jaw."

McCune hit, and Walsh blocked it. "That was fast enough," he said. "Why couldn't you hit that fast when we were sparring? Now, stop this for your face." His glove shot out, and slapped McCune between the eyes. Tim's hand was a fraction of a second late in covering.

"Well, you are slow," said Walsh. "I don't understand it. You're too slow to do anything. What seems to be the matter?"

Tim shook his head. "I dunno," he said, discouraged. "I block your leads as soon as I see them, and I lead when I see an opening; but I don't seem to do it quick enough. You're too fast for me, I guess."

"I'm not fast at all," said Walsh. "I'm over forty, and no man is fast at that age. Leaving out my extra reach, I shouldn't be able to touch you in light sparring. You used to be chain lightning; and you should be yet. You don't see my lead in time, you say. Try this."

He led again several times, as a teacher leads for a beginner. The slow leads were blocked, but the faster ones landed.

"Let's look at your eyes." He gazed long into Tim's face. The eyes were clear, blue, and clean. He passed his hand over the cranium, pausing at the healing scar. "You were all to the bad before you got this?" McCune nodded. "Well, then, did you ever get a hard rap on the head, or have any trouble with your eyes before your fight with Mulhall?"

Tim reflected. "Not just before. Maybe six months before that I was in a runaway, and got a crack on the head that laid me up for a week. My eyes never bothered me at all."

"Didn't, eh?" said Walsh. He walked over to his coat, took a newspaper from the pocket, and held it up, pointing to the heavy head-lines. "Read that." McCune read without difficulty. Walsh walked away a few steps, opened another page, and exposed other heavy type. "Read that." Tim read it, not as easily; but still he read it. "Your sight is all right," said Walsh—"that is, you see far and clear enough. Now, how quickly do you suppose you see?"

"If he sees he sees, doesn't he, Dave?" said Ward.

"Not necessarily," said Walsh. "I don't know whether the best medical opinion will bear me out, but I believe that quickness of vision differs. If it doesn't, I can't account for a lot of things I have observed. Reason it out this way, as applied to a fighter. When what his eyes sees demands a certain action of the body, there is a brain process between, which we may call comprehension, for lack of a better name. It may be an unconscious process, but it is a process, nevertheless, and it takes time. If the eye is slow to see, or the brain is slow to act, the action of the body which depends on

them is correspondingly delayed. You see how that is? And it is capable of being illustrated. Come with me."

At one end of Walsh's room a black square in an oak frame hung against the wall. In the center of the square rested an electric bulb, and on each side of it a smaller one.

"A little invention of my own," said Walsh. "Very crude and unscientific, but it will illustrate what I have just said, if I am correct in theory. At each end of this table is a button, and in the middle is another. The middle button lights the middle bulb, and the others the side bulbs."

He pressed the three buttons. The bulbs lit; the middle one red, and the sides ones green and purple respectively. Walsh drew down the heavy window-curtains, throwing the room into partial darkness.

"Now, Mr. Ward, sit down here and put your finger on this end button controlling the purple light. You, Tim, do the same at the other end; yours is the green light. Now, I sit here with my finger on the red-light switch. The degrees of pressure operating these lights are exactly the same. Switch them all off—so. Now I will light the red bulb, and the instant you see the red light—not before, mind—you press your buttons. Understand? All ready, then."

The red light glowed like a wicked eye in the darkened room, and instantly the purple bulb flashed out beside it. Then the green lit.

"Try again," said Walsh.

The result was the same.

"Which lit first, Tim, the green or the purple?"

"Both at the same time," said Tim.

Walsh exchanged a glance with Ward. "Now change places with Tim, Mr. Ward."

This time the green bulb followed the red, and the purple lit last.

"You see," said Walsh, addressing Ward. "Your eye, or your mental process, or your hand, or all three, are quicker than Tim's. Now take my place, and let me have yours."

Still the purple light was the last to show.

"There you are," said Walsh. "That takes us one step. I go back to the wall behind you, and I rap on it—so. The instant you hear the sound, press the buttons.

He rapped sharply, once. Two lights winked out side by side, simultaneously. Again he rapped, and again they lit together. Walsh took Ward's place at the table, and the latter struck the wall. The lights came almost together; if anything, Walsh was a trifle behind.

"So now we have it," he said. "It must be the eye. When Tim's hand obeys his ear, it is as quick if not quicker than ours. When it obeys his eye it is slower. Therefore, I conclude the trouble is with the eye. Mind you, this is the crudest sort of a test, but I believe it is a good one. I've had men up here who should have been fast and were not; and it was all eye trouble. That's your trouble, too, Tim, and it remains to be seen whether an eye specialist can do anything for you."

"You don't mean I'm going blind?" said McCune fearfully.

"Not a bit," replied Walsh. "Hundreds of people are walking about today in just the same condition, and don't know it, and never will know it. But they don't earn their money fighting."

That night Ward and Walsh held a long consultation, poring over a file of newspaper clippings containing a record of McCune's fights for years back. Walsh kept a record of almost every athlete of note; it was one of his hobbies.

"These show how good he was," he said. "I believe he would be the featherweight champion to-day if his eyes hadn't gone back on him. It's absolutely useless for him to fight as he is now, and I don't know whether anything can be done to help him or not. If any one can do anything, Eberts is the man. But even then it will take six months or a year to bring him into really first-class condition again."

"I'll take him back to town with me to-morrow and let Eberts make an examination," said Ward. "I owe the

boy something; and if he has a chance to get back to the top of the tree, I won't see him lose it for lack of a doctor's fee. If this obscure trouble can be cured, I'll put him in your hands for as long as you like, and when you say he is ready, we'll get some one to make a match for him with a top-notcher. What do you say?"

"I'll do it," said Walsh. "I like the boy. I'll undertake his training, and it sha'n't cost you a cent. If he can't make his living in the ring, he can make it here with me as my assistant."

VI.

Ward turned the collar of his fur coat up about his ears, grasped his bag, and stepped out upon the platform of Golden station. A blast of bitter wind drove dry, stinging snow in his face, cutting like a whip-lash. Twinkling through the blown snow-wraiths glinted the lights of Golden, latest and greatest of the world's mining-camps.

Golden — wealthy Golden, rising greatly in the desert—had demanded sport. Games of chance she already enjoyed in variety and profusion, for the town was wide open, and such a thing as a lid was quite unknown. But she clamored with the insistent demand of a red-blooded population for something more; and as the ancient city of the Tiber in her greatness demanded the gladiator, so Golden in the pride of her wealth turned to his modern successor, the pugilist. The purses she offered amazed the world. Before them the bids of the older cities and clubs shrank into insignificance. The fighting men, driven out and tabooed elsewhere, flocked to Golden; and she thrust money upon them with both hands.

She built an amphitheater of boards, harsh and unlovely, but on a scale to justify the purses. And while it was building, Kid Mulhall, the champion, and Tim McCune trained faithfully in the dry snows of the desert, preparing themselves the one to defend and the other to win the featherweight championship of the world.

As Ward stepped upon the platform, Dave Walsh, muffled to the eyes against the cold, met him and bore him away to the training camp.

Tim McCune was in bed and asleep. For weeks his life had been ordered to the minute. Body and mind he was in the hands of experts, whose business was to put him in the ring fit to fight for his life. He had patiently borne the long course of treatment of Eberts, the eye specialist; and when he returned to Walsh his old quickness of vision had come back. There for months he worked hard, and when he at last entered the ring again and claimed a return match with Mulhall, no trace of the lost year remained. His heart was in his work, and Walsh's difficulty was to keep him from overdoing it.

"He is a little wonder," said Walsh, as he and Ward sat in the former's room; "and his whole mind is set on winning from Mulhall. I believe he'll do it. Apart from the championship, he wants to get back at Purcell. Purcell, with all his smartness, is fooling himself badly this time. He doesn't believe Tim has a chance; and he is offering all kinds of money on Mulhall. The public is following his lead, for it never has confidence in a fighter who has once lost his grip, and so the odds now are about three to one against us. It's a beautiful chance to pick up money; and a few men I can trust to be close-mouthed are quietly taking all they can get, and will take as much more at the ringside. They won't come out openly just yet, because they want the best odds. I'm keeping Tim's training dark, and admitting no one. Purcell played him a dog's trick; and personally I have an old score to settle with him as well. I want this fight to break him; and that's just about what it will do, too, unless he hedges some bets."

"I'll back Tim myself," said Ward. "I don't often bet on a fight; but on your judgment, and to break that scoundrel Purcell, whom I know to be crooked, I'll take a chance on this one."

"Better see both boys work out before you decide," said Walsh. "Bet on

your own judgment, and not mine. I never advised a man to make a bet in my life. But when you see Tim to-morrow I think you'll pick him for the winner. Now we'd better turn in and get a night's rest."

When Ward rose in the morning Tim McCune had gone out on his road-work, and Ward betook himself to Mulhall's training quarters. Purcell himself admitted him. Mulhall was exercising, and as Ward watched him, Purcell, who knew him for one of the McCune supporters, studied his face keenly.

Mulhall was muffled in a sweater, finding a difficulty in making the weight. He stripped off the heavy sweater and sparred three rattling rounds with one of his trainers, and at the end of them danced back to his practise work with the wrist-machine and punching-bag unwearied and eager. His body showed magnificent development. The great muscles swelled and writhed beneath the pink skin, coil after coil; and he moved with easy, alert grace. There was none of the listlessness of overtraining. Every motion was the epitome of repressed force and boundless energy. Ward, watching him, felt that Walsh's confidence might be misplaced. Involuntarily he shook his head.

"What do you think of him?" asked Purcell, with a satisfied smile. "I hear you are backing McCune, and if so, I'll take any money offered."

"I'm not betting to-day," said Ward. "I haven't seen McCune yet, as it happens."

"Neither has anybody else," said a bystander. "McCune is a 'has been,' and this boy has the goods. He put McCune out once, and can do it again. When a fighter goes back he stays back, and McCune's people know it, or they wouldn't keep him so almighty dark in his training. Afraid of hurting the gate, I guess. Mulhall carries *my* money."

Ward turned away thoughtfully. He found McCune punching the bag. The boy was stripped to his ring costume; and Ward for the first time saw him trained and in action. Beneath the glossy skin the muscles rippled, leaped out tense, and died away. Every movement, however fast, was unhurried, and contained no suggestion of haste or waste.

Ward appraised his worth with the keen eye of the old athlete. He saw him leave the bag and go through the rest of the routine; and he detected a subtle difference between his manner of doing it and Mulhall's. In McCune there was something fiercer; something more concentrated; a hint of limitless speed and power held in reserve, to be loosed only on occasion.

"I've got to win," said Tim McCune, when the morning's work was over. "I know Mulhall, and he's good, but I'm better. Purcell is betting his whole pile on him because he thinks I'm a dead one; and there's where he loses. You put up your money on me, Mr. Ward, and I'll win it for you. Purcell robbed me once, and this time I tell you I can't lose."

"Never mind about Purcell, Tim," said Walsh. "You go into the ring thinking about Mulhall. That's all you have to do. We'll attend to Purcell."

"All right," said McCune. "Don't you worry. I won't take any chances with him—not a chance. I'll fight as you tell me. But Purcell's got it coming to him, just the same."

VII.

The coliseum was full from ring-side to roof. The preliminary bout was over, and the crowd called impatiently for Mulhall and McClune. In the ring, the announcer bellowed unheeded. He ceased, and a heavy-weight pugilist issued a general challenge to the world. The crowd cheered him, and he withdrew.

Tip Purcell grasped a post and hoisted his huge frame inside the ropes. In his hand was a crumpled sheaf of money. On behalf of Mulhall, as prospective winner, he accepted a challenge. He shook the money at the crowd, leaning far over the ropes.

"Even money, no limit, Mulhall

wins!" he shouted. There were no takers. He circled the ring, repeating the offer. It was not accepted. "Five thousand to four thousand; five thousand to three thousand; two to one, any amount, on Mulhall!" He surveyed the crowd fiercely, shaking the money aloft. "Three thousand to one thousand Mulhall wins!"

"I'll take that," said Ward. "I'll take it ten times, if you like."

"Once will do at that rate," said Purcell. He climbed down beside Ward. "I'll give you two to one, any quantity."

"I'll bet five thousand against ten on McCune," said a man in a white Stetson hat, and trousers shoved into his boots.

"Taken," said Purcell.

"One thousand to five thousand Mulhall is knocked out!" said Ward.

Purcell eyed him a moment. He was suddenly suspicious. His money was being taken up at the ringside faster than he had anticipated.

"Taken," he said slowly.

"And one thousand to ten thousand Mulhall is knocked out before the twelfth round," said Ward.

Purcell bent his brows. "No," he said. "You are playing long chances for big odds. I've made most of my bets now. Anything more I'll put on at even money. No more fool bets on rounds or knockouts."

The man in the white Stetson pulled out a huge bundle of bills, tied carelessly with a shoe-lace.

"Put up all you want to at even money, and I'll cover it," he said.

Purcell smiled, and began to count off greenbacks from his roll.

A roar from the crowd greeted Tim McCune, who, wrapped in a gaudy blanket bath-robe, was forcing his way to the ring. As he climbed through the ropes he caught sight of Purcell. He leaned down and addressed the man in the Stetson.

"Take every dollar that thief will bet against me," he cried. "You big stiff! you robbed me once, and this is where you lose. Here's where you get yours."

"I've bet about all I can stand now, Tim," said Purcell, unmoved; "and if you win you put a crimp in my roll for fair. Trouble is you can't win. You're a dead one, and you know it. You won't last five rounds." He was deliberately taunting the boy.

Walsh, who had accompanied Tim, interposed sharply.

"Tim, take your corner!" McCune, scowling, walked across the ring and sat down. "You've got him just where you want him. He has bet about all he has on Mulhall. Remember you are fighting Mulhall, and not Purcell!"

A fresh roar from the crowd greeted the champion, Kid Mulhall. He vaulted lightly over the ropes and acknowledged the salutation with a wave of the hand.

McCune sat quietly in his corner listening to the last whispered instructions of his seconds while the gloves were being adjusted on his hands. Occasionally he nodded at a suggestion, but his eyes never left Mulhall. The crowd, the glaring lights, the resin-strewn, padded canvas took him back to that other time when he had faced the same foe with disastrous results. This time he felt no uncertainty; he would win, and he knew it.

Then bath-robes were thrown aside, and for the first time the crowd saw the perfect physical development of each, a murmur of admiration, almost a gasp, rising from ringside to roof. The referee called them to the center, and McCune heard his instructions with the same curious sense of abstraction. He touched Mulhall's glove perfunctorily, the gong clanged, and the first round began.

Mulhall found an opening. Like the vicious flick of a whip he struck, throwing every ounce of his body into the blow; it landed on McCune's glove, but the slap of it brought uproar from the spectators. McCune danced away from a rush, just out of range, a half-smile on his lips, his face and eyes inscrutable and expressionless.

This was his work and his life, and he loved it. The spring of his limbs beneath him, the feeling of power as

he struck, the contact of his hardened body with that other body equally hardened in a clinch—each was a pure delight to him. It was his game, and he played it for the love of it, and the joy it brought him.

He felt no animosity toward Mulhall. Even when a blow came home, jarring him from head to foot; even when he struck with every pound of fierce energy at his command, his feeling was impersonal.

Round followed round. The fight was fast, and the spectators leaned forward in their seats, eager-eyed, intent.

McCune kept to his instructions, but he chafed at them. He was eager to be told to do his best—to go to his man. Then he would show the crowd his real form. Once he thought his time was coming. Mulhall seemed to be slowing down. His work had lost a little of its snap and accuracy.

"I can end it now," said McCune to Walsh.

"Wait," said Walsh. "He's perfectly fresh, and playing for a knockout. Keep covered, and be careful."

In the next round Mulhall fought mechanically. He took several blows without a return. His legs seemed weak beneath him; movement plainly cost him an effort. His eyes were unreadable and his look dogged. Then, in an interchange, McCune left an opening. Mulhall's face lit savagely, and he struck on the instant, a bullet-like blow for the point of the chin—straight, swift, and clean. Just such another blow had once ushered McCune into dreamland. Now he blocked it partially, but it jarred him from head to heel. Mulhall followed up his advantage, and the rally that followed brought the crowd to its feet. McCune, steadying his reeling brain by an effort, fought back with a desperate gameness. Only the gong saved him.

"What did I tell you?" said Walsh. The seconds were working hard, freshening Tim for the next round.

"All right," said Tim. "He didn't get me. I'm feeling fine. Let me go to him a little."

Then the spectators saw a change. McCune forced the battle. Always he was at Mulhall, boring in, worrying him, but never losing caution. He gave him no respite, and he began to wear him down. Mulhall's work was still accurate, but something had gone from it. He had lost a shade of his quickness, a little of his steam.

McCune noted the change, which this time held no deception. The half-smile with which he fought deepened. He began to use his weight and strength, and to rough it in clinches remorselessly, and was cautioned by the referee. Once, in a clinch, he looked down into the grim mask of Purcell, and laughed aloud. He pressed Mulhall harder, reading defeat in the dogged look of the game little fighter, seeking an opening to end the battle.

Again he drove him into a corner. Mulhall fought himself free, but at a heavy cost. Again he was driven to the ropes; and once more he broke loose, but sadly weakened. The crowd was on its feet now, no longer clamoring, but hushed in the face of the event.

McCune, his eyes fixed on Mulhall's, followed him catlike, pouring in blows through his weakened guard. For an instant Mulhall, swinging wildly, exposed his chin. McCune whipped his right hand across at it with the speed of light. Then he stepped back and dropped his hands. The fight was over.

Mulhall swayed, his arms fell, his head sank, and he crashed, face downward, on the padded floor. Above him the referee's arm swung back and forth, with the even stroke of a pendulum. From floor to roof the house howled to the victor and the vanquished. The referee ceased his count, and pointed to McCune. Then pandemonium broke loose.

And in the midst of it, Tim McCune, champion featherweight, at the top of the tree, broke away from those swarming about him shaking his gloved hands, ran to the ropes, and, leaning far over, grinned a battered smile into the face of Tip Purcell, stripped of nearly every dollar he had in the world.

"A 'dead one,' am I?" he cried shrilly.

After the Raid

By George Randolph Chester
Author of "The Failure of Blue Pete," Etc.

Detective Burton, alias Blue Pete, was introduced to readers of the "Popular" in March last. He was such an original detective that we asked Mr. Chester to tell us something more about him. In this story Blue Pete and his old quarry, "Chicago Red," are again at sword's point. The yeggman's sister has an interesting part to play when the net is about to be drawn over "Chicago Red." It is an uncommonly good story, quite out of the beaten track.

(*A Complete Story*)

THE one with the bullet in his shoulder was forced to sit down to rest, while his companion, a sturdily built man with a blue scar upon his cheek, surveyed him anxiously in the white moonlight that filtered through the trees.

"Can't you make it, Red?" he asked.

"Sure I'll make it!" snarled the other, fiercely subduing the moan that struggled to his lips. By a stern effort of will he conquered the dizzy feeling that was in his head, the blackness that threatened to obscure his vision, the temptation to let himself sink backward upon the ground, and, having beaten back these symptoms of blood faintness, he laughed.

"Funny, ain't it?" he commented weakly, instinct turning him to ordinary conversation in the attempt to convince himself that he was normal again. "I'd always expected to get plugged by some bull or fly cop, but here when I do get mine it's from a yegg puffin'-rod."

Under other circumstances Blue Pete himself would have smiled that this desperate yeggman had been shot while attempting to thwart a band of his own class, instead of getting his logical bullet from the revolver of a policeman or detective, but just now his chief anxiety was to get Chicago Red back from the railroad, through ravines and across hills, to the comfortable little cabin where his mother and brother and sister lived their clean lives in ignorance of the real blackness of their stray black sheep.

With some hesitation he drew a flask from his pocket. It was nearly empty, and he had been reserving its precious contents for a last emergency. The imperative need seemed now to have come, and all too soon, for he could see, even in the deceptive moonlight, that Red's face was growing perceptibly paler, that his jaw was sagging, that his eyelids were drooping.

He held up the bottle to the light, and turned it to one side so that the amber liquid in it should mass itself in one corner, giving him a better estimate of the exact amount. There was barely more than an ordinary whisky glassful of it, and he would have given much, just now, for some of the liquor that he had wasted on the band of yeggs early that night, before they had run their handcar out of its concealment and had left these two in the lurch at the old lime-

kiln while they went on to terrorize the village of Claypool and rob its only bank.

This was no time for regrets, however, nor was it a time, he reflected, to trust that bottle in Red's hands. With practical ingenuity he suddenly unclasped his watch from its chain and snapped open the lid, into which he poured a few drops, measuring them out carefully and grudgingly. He touched the lid to Red's lips, and the first sting of the liquid upon the man's tongue aroused him, so that he grasped eagerly the hand that held the watch, and drained the smallest drink that had ever been poured out for him. Little as it was, however, it revived him almost instantly, for when his companion, after replacing the bottle and watch in his pockets, stopped and caught him by the arm, he arose to his feet and plodded on up the ravine, though he staggered slightly.

A pungent odor made Blue Pete put his hand hastily upon the bottle. It was as he feared. In replacing it in his pocket, the cork had fallen out, and, with mechanical impulse, he dropped back a pace or two to look for it. Where this backward turn brought him he was still in view of the railroad, its bright steel tracks glistening like silver where he could see them through the trees.

Realizing the folly of trying to find the missing cork, he was about to rejoin his dazed companion, when his ears caught the sharp crunch of gravel, and he paused. Within a moment more four men came into view. They were walking slowly, and their faces were turned toward his side of the track.

"It's along in here somewhere, I'm sure," he heard one of the men say.

"No," insisted another. "It is farther on, I tell you. I was there myself today, and I ought to know. There ought to be a mile-post not ten rods away."

There was some further discussion which he could not clearly catch, then the quartet trudged on. For just a moment the possibility came to the man with the scar that they were tracking Red, but he dismissed that idea as quickly as it came, and hurried on after the wounded man, who was still plodding mechanically toward the only haven that he knew—the little cabin that, with its fertile valley, was shut in by jealous hills on every side, and that, even if it were discovered, could not possibly be selected as the home of one of the most desperate criminals that had ever become the burden of half a dozen States.

The rest of that journey was a nerve-racking one, a constant race between whether Red's meager supply of strength or the other man's meager supply of stimulants should give out the first. There were branching ravines and cross gullies to traverse, among the intricate mazes of which the instinct of the wounded man alone was their guide; there were steep little hills to struggle up and clamber down, with no clearer track than that followed by a bird in its flight; there were vague shadows that looked like moving men; there were flying creatures of the night that swooped by them on black wings with eery shrieks; there were little brook streams to cross, that, in the silence of the moonlit night, seemed in their babbling and gurgling to talk with strangely human voices; there were glow-eyed forms that scampered before them, close to the ground across the carpet of fallen leaves, from shadow into shadow; there were mysteriously waving branches and rustling underbrush; there were stones to loosen that went sliding and crashing down upon shale and slate outcropping, with strangely magnified noises which seemed, in their startling intensity, to become tiny avalanches; and all throughout that journey Blue Pete measured their progress, not by the advance they had made, but by the drops of precious liquor that dripped from the mouth of his flask into the lid of his watch-case.

The bottle was drained; its last slow-gathering globule had fallen and had been put upon the tongue of Chicago Red when they topped the last hill that had stood between the wounded man and his home. The little valley and the dark cabin in its center seemed weirdly silent and aloof from the world as Blue

Pete looked down upon it. The only other time he had seen it had been in daylight, except from the backward glance he had given it as he had left it that night. He would have liked to pause for a moment before making his way down into the dry rustling corn-rows through which they must pass to get to the house; he would have liked to ponder, hesitating, upon his possible reception there, upon how the lithe, tall girl with the glorious crown of auburn would receive him this time. She had looked upon him then with more than suspicion; how would she look upon him now that he was bringing her brother home, wounded in an encounter the true explanation of which was so wild and improbable that it could not but sound like a lie?

The man at his side swayed unsteadily against him, and he supported him quickly. Red again showed an inclination to drag, but now the final stretch was to be covered and his conductor forced him on. Half-way through the corn-field Red grew suddenly limp, and fell back, but Blue Pete, prepared for this emergency in the last toilsome stretch, grasped his arm with his right hand and put his shoulder in the middle of Red's back, then began pushing him determinedly, even roughly, forward, the limp feet flopping out in awkward steps, as he had handled men who were dead drunk. But this travel over rough ground and between rows of stiff corn-stalks into which they bumped at every step was not like progress over a smooth pavement, and the man, sturdy as he was, began to doubt that his own strength would hold out for the journey.

Had it not been that occasionally their rough progress gave the wounded shoulder a twinge that brought forth a moan of pain and aroused the wounded man, himself raw-boned and heavy, to a painful and reluctant awakening, the man with the scarred cheek might not have been able to make it, but at last, panting and perspiring, almost exhausted, he drew his burden up to the door underneath the dark porch and knocked. He had placed his arm around the now entirely limp Red, supporting him with his hip, and had braced himself for a reasonable wait, but to his surprise the door swung instantly open, and a man's deep voice spoke from within:

"Just one minute, gentlemen, until the light is lit, and you may search the house."

A lamp flared up and was carried toward them. With a thrill Blue Pete recognized in its bearer the girl whose hand-clasp had tingled in his own for hours after he had left her that other time. As the light flooded out upon them the man inside gave an exclamation of surprise.

"Will!" he gasped, recognizing Red. "The worst place you could have brought him. A constable was here today hunting him, and went away unsatisfied."

The girl had raised the lamp high over her head to see clearly, and Blue Pete caught the flash of her eyes as she looked upon him with a distrust that he fancied was mingled with thorough dislike.

"Don't you see he is wounded, Dan?" she interposed.. "Bring him in at once. Up-stairs in the attic would be better."

She set the lamp upon a table, and, hurrying into the kitchen, returned in a moment with a lighted candle. She was already half-way up the narrow stairway when the two men, Blue Pete breathless from exertion and Red's brother from dull surprise, heavily lifted the unconscious man in at the door. Straining and shuffling they carried him up to the attic and put him into the white little bed which the girl's deft hands had already prepared. The men undressed him, and then, for the first time, Blue Pete, who had some surgical skill, was able to give the wound anything like proper attention.

It was an ugly shot, the bullet having carried pieces of the clothing into the hole. It had gone through to the shoulder-blade and had glanced downward from that, passing dangerously near to a vital point, but it had penetrated far enough so that now it lay just underneath the skin of the back, and, with a

sharp knife, Blue Pete skilfully cut it out before going any further. He had stanched the wound in front, but from this new one a mass of dark clotted blood rolled out, and for the next half-hour he worked with feverish energy.

He was conscious by and by that some one was at his side helping him, coolly, deftly, quietly, and, without turning to look at her, he knew that it was Nellie Logan.

Hot water and bandages and all other necessities had been to his hand when he wanted them, and before he had even had time to ask for them; but it was not until he had Red as thoroughly comfortable as he could be made under the circumstances that a word was exchanged between them. He straightened up with a deep sigh and squared back his shoulders to relieve the ache in them, and as he turned toward the girl with a conventional expression of thanks for her help he found her looking at him coldly.

"How did it happen?" she asked.

Blue Pete flushed and ran his fingers through his hair. He had been wondering how he should answer this inevitable question, but his very gesture seemed an incriminating one.

"You see, I am a railroad detective," he began lamely.

"Exactly," the girl interrupted him contemptuously. "The other time you were here it was as a cattle-buyer."

"Detectives do not usually state their business," he replied, flushing again, "but I *am* a detective. My name is Peter Burton."

"Banks, the other time," she observed in quiet scorn.

"Maybe it was," he retorted hotly. "If you will let me, however, I am trying to tell you the truth just now."

"You always do, don't you?"

With an angry wave of the hand, he swept this sarcasm aside.

"Listen, will you!" he commanded. "We captured a gang of burglars tonight who were escaping on a hand-car after having robbed the bank of Claypool, and one of them shot your brother. We——"

The girl laughed mirthlessly.

"The other time, if I remember rightly," she reminded him., "Will had a controversy with *another* cattle-buyer, only it was the other man that got shot."

Blue Pete turned from her hopelessly. Red moaned, and he stooped down to drop some cooling liniment upon the bandage.

"I might just as well have lied to you," he said a trifle bitterly.

Again the girl laughed disdainfully, but before she could reply the sharp report of a rifle outside startled them both.

"That's just to let you know, you in the corn-field, there!" called a sharp voice in front of the door. "I'll kill the first man that comes a step nearer this house!"

It was Red's brother who, a widower in the same month that he had been made a father, had a sternness that sat heavily upon so young a man. Blue Pete frowned and went hastily downstairs. He remembered the quartet that he had seen upon the railroad track.

"Don't be too fresh, young man!" came the reply from the edge of the corn-field. "We can do a little shooting ourselves, and we'll start it if we don't get Chicago Red Logan."

"Chic—— There's no one of that name here," replied Dan.

"William H. Logan, then, if you must have it the way it's on the Bertillon cards. We want him, quick, and want him back in the cell he broke out of."

"You lie!" retorted Dan hotly.

"We'll take you, too, if you're not careful!" broke in another heavy voice. "We'll pinch the whole family. I suppose you're all crooks!"

There was a sharp click as Dan impetuously drew his rifle to position, but at the same moment the door had opened and Blue Pete put his hand on the young man's arm.

"Don't do that," he said. "Dan, leave this matter to me."

Up-stairs Red moved uneasily and opened his eyes.

"Where's mother?" he asked weakly.

"Gone over to Uncle Henry's with Dan's baby. You mustn't talk, Will."

"Where's Blue Pete?"

"Blue Pete!" she repeated.

Red's slow thought grasped that he had made a mistake in using that name.

"Oh, that's just what I call him in a kidding way," he explained.

"No, you don't, Will!" she cried in sudden enlightenment. "I see through it all now. Wait."

She went down the stairs swiftly, and on the porch she confronted her brother's friend with flaming eyes.

"So you are the man who has misled my brother!" she charged. "Blue Pete, the notorious thief! I wondered why that scar on your face seemed so familiar the first time I saw you. Why, I have seen it described in a dozen newspapers that told of your miserable misdeeds. With burglary after burglary at your door it is no wonder that Will is in trouble every time he sees you! Gentlemen," she called, turning suddenly to the group of men still standing in indecision at the edge of the cornfield a few rods in front of them, "you are mistaken about my brother, but you sha'n't go away empty-handed. I turn over to you a scoundrel you will be very glad to get—the infamous Blue Pete! Here he is! Take him!"

She pointed her finger at him in withering scorn. To her surprise the man did not make the swift movement at self-defense that she had anticipated. He merely smiled, and she was still more surprised when a laugh came from the posse.

"Hello, Burton," said one of them, stepping closer. "We didn't know you were on the job, or we would not have interfered. Do you need any help?"

"No," replied Blue Pete. "Is that you, Henderson?"

"Yes. I don't understand why the old man sent us here if he knew you were coming—unless you came on your own hook."

Burton found the girl gazing upon him with terror-stricken eyes. Her face, that had been flushed with anger, had now paled.

"So you are a detective, after all!" she said, in a strangely whispering voice. "And you came here for Will! Well, you sha'n't have him in *this* way. I can handle a gun myself."

She was suddenly gone, but in a moment more she appeared in the doorway, side by side with her brother Dan, holding a second rifle.

"Get away from this house at once," she ordered him, "and join your other bloodhounds. Dan and I will fight you as long as we have a bullet left!"

"Wait a minute," he replied, and took a step toward her.

Like a flash the gun came to her shoulder.

"I don't want to kill you on my own door-step, but I don't want you to make the fatal mistake of thinking that I will not do it if you make it necessary!"

He did not flinch, and he found time even in that tense moment to admire the poise of her splendid body as she confronted him, the rich mass of deep red hair surrounding her face like a halo.

"As I tell you," he said quietly; "wait a moment. You have got this all wrong. Go up-stairs and get your brother presentable. Henderson," he called, "we have all made a mistake. Red isn't here, though there is another brother up-stairs. I mistook him for Red myself, and shot him in the shoulder. Whichever one of you knows Red the best may take a look at this man. You know him, I think, Henderson. Come in."

The girl was looking at him with parted lips and strangely puzzled expression.

"Is this some new trick?" she asked, in a low voice.

"Do as I tell you," he muttered sharply.

She winced at the lash in his tone, and she gazed long and earnestly into his eyes; then she dropped her own lids, and, after an instant of confused hesitation, turned and went up to the little attic room. He had mastered her, or had gained her confidence, he could not tell which.

When Henderson came up with Burton a moment or so later they found Red lying back upon white pillows with closed eyes. His hair had been dyed recently enough for the new color to seem natural; better, in fact, than when it was first put on, for it had lost the some-

what artificial gloss; moreover, Red's face, drawn and pale from exhaustion and suffering, looked vastly different from that of the lusty and ruddy Chicago Red whom Henderson had faced in court-room and cell.

"It is another one, after all," Henderson agreed, after a careful scrutiny. "Strong resemblance, though."

"Yes, it fooled me," said Burton. "Enough so that I winged him. I have been doing the best I could for him in the way of bandaging till I could get a doctor. I guess we'd better leave the room, too; it makes him restless."

They stalked down-stairs.

"Then this is another wild-goose chase," observed Henderson gloomily, looking out across the corn-field. "Wonder if we hadn't better guard the place, anyhow. We had a sure tip that Red was in the neighborhood, and he might come in yet."

"Don't think so," replied Burton. "Doubtless left the country by this time, and if not, they will have gotten word to him to stay away, since the bungling, single-handed visit that I understand you made this afternoon. The next you'll hear of Red will be in St. Louis or Chicago."

"I expect so," admitted Henderson. "I'd give a leg to get him. The old man has been crazy ever since Red escaped. Thinks it reflects on his own efficiency. Going back with us?"

"I believe not," decided Burton. "I rather owe it to this chap not to leave him until he is clear out of danger. By the way, I wish you'd send me a doctor when you go back to town to take the train."

"All right," returned Henderson crisply, and he strode away.

A moment later the waving corn showed the passage of the men as they filed through it on their way across the hills to the railroad track. Burton climbed the stairs wearily. He did not like perjury; he did not like this feeling that he had been a traitor to his profession, to his chief, to the public at large, yet ——

At Red's bedside he found the girl holding a glass of water to her brother's lips. His eyes were open, and he smiled faintly.

"I heard what you did, old pal," he said. "You're game, all right. Nellie, the cat's out of the bag now, and you might as well know the truth; because you're bound to find it out, anyhow. I've been doing some bad tricks, and if it wasn't for Burton here, I'd be worse off than I am. Why, the last time he was here I did not know that all this 'Blue Pete the Bandit' business was a frame-up with the newspapers so that he could stand ace-high with the yeggs whenever he met them. I thought he was a sure enough gun man—we all thought so—till he came here after me—and he got me, too. We had a fight right after we left here, and he licked me; then, somehow, he let me go. He could have throwed me back in jail as easy as turning his hand over. It is right what he told you about fighting the hand-car gang. Burton was with them when I run across them to-night, and it was his game to go into Claypool on the hand-car with them, and turn them over with the goods on them before they got a chance to break open the safe, but they got away from him, so Burton and me laid for them as they came back with the loot. We wrecked their car and snagged every one of them, and put them in charge of the conductor of the flyer that had to stop while the wreck was cleaned up. In the scrimmage I got this bullet, and then Burton brought me home here. That was twice he had a chance to put me back in jail, but he didn't do it. He's all to the mustard, Nellie, Burton is."

"But I don't understand," faltered the girl, looking from her brother to Burton. "Why should you——"

Burton lifted his eyes and let them dwell full upon her own, with all in them that a man could say without speech to the girl for whom his whole heart longs. Suddenly she dropped her lashes in confusion, while the crimson wave suffused her face, her brow, her neck. She understood now.

Zollenstein

By W. B. M. Ferguson

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CHAPTER XV—(*Continued.*)

E need fear no interruption for some time," Zenia said, prettily arranging the lunch-tray the men had brought. "We will leave ways and means behind the door until later. Do you take sugar?"

And she eyed me, her head at a pretty angle, while she held aloft the silver tongs.

"Madam," said I, my heart pounding, "it is a loathsome duty, but before I sit down to break bread with you it is but fair that you should be acquainted with my sins against——"

"Tut, tut!" she chided, with reproving finger. "Leave the confessional to those who are best qualified to conduct it. It has no place with grapefruit, tea, and salad. And who has not sinned? Cream, Sir Mortimer?"

"At least, madam," said I desperately, "I cannot labor under another's name. You have treated me on terms of equality—I am not the Viscount Greystone."

"Faith, I know that!" said she coolly. "I am acquainted with the viscount—perhaps you are his younger brother, assuming his title——"

"No, madam. It was a misunderstanding. I am plain John Mortimer. I have not attained the peerage——"

"Fie!" she cut in. "Have you so soon forgotten our late ceremony? Sir," she reproved gently, "it is enough that you have attained the peerage in my—— I mean" — hastily — "rank never yet fashioned a man. And now a truce to such superfluities. Our engagement is with the ever present. Did I understand that you took cream, Sir Mortimer?"

And so, obediently, I threw dull care behind me, while over the lunch I endeavored to entertain the Princess Zenia. We discussed everything but our present plight, and I fell more hopelessly in love than ever. Certainly, I venture to think, no meal had been conducted under a more al fresco condition.

Though by common consent personalities were disbarred, yet under the understanding of her eyes and the wonderful sympathy of her smile, I could not eliminate the personal note. Little by little, almost unconsciously, pieces of my past life slipped out unchecked, until at length she had almost the entire pattern for contemplation. And it was not until later that I understood that she had listened, absorbed, without reproof.

"You have had a sad life," she commented, wide-eyed. "Very sad, indeed. But without opposition there is no progression."

"I suppose so," I grimly agreed. Where had I progressed? For I had not dared tell her of my ugly adventure at the Carlton; of the charge of manslaughter, possibly murder, that confronted me. I had laid my advent in Zollenstein simply to love for adventure.

"I am sorry to have inflicted such tawdry personalities upon you," I apologized, recovering my balance. "It was generous of you to listen. Why I

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should repeat them I do not know. Possibly—well, I have never known a sister, a mother—it is weakness——"

"It is strength," she corrected gravely. "Such longing is strength. And no one's life is tawdry. It is only the tinsel that we scatter through it that may make it so. There has not been very much in yours, Mr. Mortimer. I see more of the red badge of courage."

"And," thought I, "if you cared to look closer, possibly the felon's stripes."

Just then a great commotion arose in the corridor—men's voices; the sound of running feet.

"They have discovered Grotz," whispered Zenia, white-faced, finger on lips. "You had better hide, I think. In any case, Michu will be here presently for the tray." And she consulted her watch.

I bowed my withdrawal, and entered the dark, gloomy closet. Presently some one entered the room, and I heard a woman's voice—evidently that of the chambermaid. She retired in due time, and then a knock sounded gently on my prison door.

"We must lower our voices," whispered Zenia, as I followed her into her room. "Michu said she thought she heard me talking. I said I was saying my prayers—what a ghastly untruth! They think you have escaped. Michu said you had taken Grotz's keys. It seems they open the rear door."

"Many thanks for her information," I laughed cautiously. "Here are the keys—I suppose this large one is the open-sesame. We will remember when the time comes. And now, your highness, I think it is about time we bring ways and means from behind the door."

"Seconded," she assented, assuming a mock-serious demeanor. "The first question laid before the august board is: Where are we?"

"That," I confessed, "I do not know; neither the country nor kingdom—but I might guess with safety at the hemisphere."

"From the window," she said musingly, "we have nothing but a dignified view of the sky and several unsatisfying trees. Hence it is deduced that we are on the top floor of some castle in the kingdom of somewhere. The august board approves the logical and highly intelligent answer, and passes to the reason for our incarceration: Why are we here?"

"Why, oh, why?" said I. "Possibly the second question will answer the first."

"You mean," she supplemented, with her quick intuition, "if Captain Kienert is desirous of holding me for ransom—or for any other reason—he would fly to his own province? Very sound reasoning, Sir Mortimer; but he has no province other than Austria, and we hardly are there, for we employed no seven-league boots."

"He might have some stray castle tucked away somewhere against just such a contingency. Evidently your abduction was carefully planned."

"I don't think he is in a position to have stray castles at his disposition. They cost something," she argued, with pursed lips. "You see, with the exception of my curtailed freedom, I have been treated with uniform courtesy, and all my wants have been attended to. So have yours, it seems. If you are his enemy, why not make away with you out of hand? No," she finished with a sigh; "we are completely in the dark as regards our amiable friend's plans. They are wonderfully and mysteriously abominable."

We discussed at length our plans for escape. It was decided to wait a few days; even until the first dark night. And I was nothing loath to agree to this proposition. A prolongation of our intimacy would not come amiss to me. And, though our food supply was scanty, one portion necessarily having to do duty for two, we decided wisely to establish a reserve commissariat department to sustain us on our flight. For, ten chances to one, we might be leagues from human habitation.

"I suppose you couldn't bribe Michu to help us?" I suggested. "A friend in the enemy's camp is worth a dozen beyond the breastworks."

"She is like pig iron," said Zenia. "Oh, if I ever regain my sovereignty, won't there be a merry reckoning!"

"Kienert must be assured of the secrecy of our prison," said I; "for all Saxonia, and even Zollenstein, must be searching for your highness."

She was silent, wide-eyed. Then: "I wonder if my very good uncle, Boris, is concerned in this outrage." Her eyes, with a start, came back from the land of dreams, and inspected me keenly. "Are—are you acquainted with the kingdom's affairs?"

"I think so," I ventured. "I know that Duke Boris is not your uncle. I know that he is a regicide."

"You know much," she finished dryly. "Very much for—for——"

"An adventurer," I supplemented quietly.

She flushed slightly.

"You are ungenerous. I thought rank, everything, had been forgotten; waived under these conditions. Yes, we have met but for the first time. I am the Lady Zenn, Sir Mortimer. I am in distress——"

"It is a pretty conceit," I granted; "but the present must ever be but a reflex action of the past."

"You would make a poor playmate for a child," she laughed, considering me. "You are too unimaginative. You won't pretend."

"I have pretended before this. Pretended with a vengeance."

She met my eyes, and I watched the blood come to her face.

"You—you mean the night you played my brother Hugo?" she asked steadily. Then suddenly, in some confusion: "You have never explained how you came to be under the necessity of assuming the rôle."

"I never was asked. Simply, I was trespassing at Heimruh, made prisoner, and availed myself of the only vehicle of escape opportunity afforded."

She fell greatly abstracted. At length, diffidently: "Did—did I ever apologize for those welts of the riding-whip? Or perhaps you don't remember. I own a horrible temper."

"They say the best of steel is tempered."

"I hope I am not as cold as that," she returned quickly; "though, sometimes, and at the wrong time, I am as flexible. Your compliments are wofully ambiguous, Sir Mortimer."

And so repartee was bandied back and forth. I was living for the moment oblivious to conditions; and mayhap the Princess Zenia found some small amusement or distraction in the performance, for she failed to evince ennui.

"Do you know," she said half-seriously, as I emerged triumphantly from a scrimmage of badinage, by virtue, I suspect, of her generosity rather than any personal acumen, "there are fleeting moments when you remind me of my mother!" I sat dumb under the flagrant compliment. "I mean it," she continued seriously. "It is a peculiar twist to your upper lip when you smile. And sometimes there comes a look in your eyes that puts me in mind of Hugo."

"Possibly," I ventured, not knowing exactly what to say, "if we traced our genealogy back to Adam, we might find we were related."

And on this easy footing night came and found us still chatting aimlessly. Then I retired to my humble closet, while Michu made her advent with supper. Afterward, by the soft gleam of the electric light, I read aloud in a subdued voice from Shakespeare; while Zenia, in a low rocker, bathed in the refulgent glow, toyed with a piece of embroidery she had procured from Michu—just to keep her out of mischief, as she said.

At times I filched a glance at her bent head, her wealth of hair all a-spangle, a soft flush mingling with the subdued shadows on her face; her hands—there was a curious fascination connected with them—plying the needle with deft, unconscious grace. It was a charming picture—a very sweet intimacy. Under these unique conditions came my first experience of, and mighty appreciation for, the domestic element in man's life. And perhaps the thought of the fleeting present, the ever encroaching future, and what it might bring in its wake, made it but the dearer.

Ten chimed from the little ormolu clock on the old oak mantel.

"Oh, dear!" exclaimed Zenia, suddenly looking up; "is it as late as that? Surely not. How Shakespeare makes the time fly!"

"For me," said I, trying to speak dispassionately, "it is not Shakespeare."

She met my eyes for a fleeting moment, then bent lower over her embroidery. "I think," she said composedly, at length, rising and putting by her work, "that it is time all good folks were abed. Thank you so much for 'Othello.'" All her old time regal dignity had swept about her. She was no longer the girl; the child of many graces, many moods; the budding woman of charming whims. She was the Princess Zenia, of Saxonia. Courteously, almost formally, she extended me her hand, and, bowing, I kissed it.

"Till another morn, Sir Knight," she whispered graciously.

I repaired to the darkened boudoir. Then, for the first time, I remembered that our jailers had removed the key from the connecting door. I drew Grotz's long dirk, and stood in the doorway.

"Madam," said I gravely, "this lies between us." And I laid it by the threshold and closed the door.

But almost instantly it was opened, and Zenia stood there, backed by the light, the naked blade, half-extended, in her hand.

"My trust, Sir Mortimer," she said simply, steadily, "is not measured by knife-blades."

Surely it was the greatest proof of faith woman could give, and I retired to my couch with the naked dirk with full heart; with the prayer that I might ever deserve it.

CHAPTER XVI.

A MIDNIGHT RECONNAISSANCE.

Another day passed in impromptu intimacy, Zenia treating me as an equal, as a brother. But, dear as it was, I bolstered my vanity with no false suppositions nor delusions. I knew full well the potentiality of propinquity. Necessarily we were thrown constantly in each other's society; reduced almost to a unit by a common danger. She looked to me for support as protection as primitive woman looked to primitive man.

She could not be actuated by any feeling other than that. But with me it was vastly different. I treasured every moment, storing it carefully away, to be drawn upon for consolation when the future rendered all barren and drear. Were we ever apportioned our original rôles in life's drama, I knew the Princess Zenia would as much deign to receive me on terms of equality as the prima donna her stage-hand.

Nor did I count this feeling unworthy. There can be no such thing as equality in nature. The rose will ever be queen; the weed ever the grubbing underling. Mayhap this philosophy was untrue; mayhap it wronged the Princess Zenia; but at least I was not so high in the clouds that I had no cognizance of my feet. And life had thoroughly drilled into me the perhaps cynical belief. Too often had I seen it acted out not to profit by the example. So I was content with the moment; asking nothing but to serve my lady; my payment her smile.

Of Captain Kiefert we saw nothing; but Zenia learned, from an inadvertent remark dropped by Michu, that he had been absent since the morning following our arrival.

"It is very strange," she commented. "I do not understand it at all. Perhaps some unexpected check to his plans has developed."

"I think," said I, though loath to terminate our intimacy, "that we had best try to escape while the principal enemy is absent. The day looks as if the night may favor us with cloudiness."

She was silent. "Perhaps it is better so," she murmured, at length. "Have you any plan?"

"None other than chance may dictate," I confessed. "We can easily win clear of this door—a mere forcing of

the lock-plate—and we have the key to the rear one."

"Aye," she smiled; "but where may that rear one be? Obviously, you say, in the rear; but must we depend solely upon our instinct and desperate hopes to point the way?"

"You are loath to put fortune to the touch, madam?" smiled I.

She looked about the cozy room, and shivered slightly. "Who knows?" She shrugged. "But the frying-pan is passably bearable, while the fire——" And she spread her little hands.

"Madam," said I, after some thought, "I think I own a more heady plan. Man can stake all upon a single throw, but not so woman. She abhors a step in the dark—possibly because no one can see her foot. But I think a reconnaissance is much in demand. I will essay it to-night. I will learn the highways and byways of the house, so that there may be no mishap when we come to try it in earnest."

"No, no," she cried impulsively, "you must not. I did not mean that. You will not go"—pleading in her eyes. "If —if anything should befall you——"

"Why, then, madam, it would be in a worthy cause. At least I would not die of stagnation——"

"Oh," she said softly, cupping her chin; "and—and is this stagnation?"

"I did not mean it in that sense. I think you know that. But it is for your highness' good. Besides, I do not hope for a requiem. It will be very easy. When the house sleeps I can slip over the ground of our proposed route. Then, fully aware of turn and counter-turn, chance will have small opportunity of setting us at naught. He travels quickest who travels alone, they say. It is better that one should meet success or disaster than two."

"There is much logic in your suggestion, and I suppose it is the wisest course," she said, twisting the rings on her fingers; "and yet—and yet——" She did not finish, but turned her eyes windowward.

"Then it is agreed, madam?" And she did not say me nay.

We spent the rest of the day in chatting, reading, or light raillery. But, however vivacious, her highness would fall strangely silent at times, and her eyes gather some of the sky's somber cloudiness.

When Jacques had departed with our supper tray I bent all my energies to the door. And here I found that my expectations of conquest had been more sanguine than intelligent, for the lock-plate was absolutely impregnable. Five minutes' sincere effort convinced me of this. I was nonplused, alarmed. Then, in truth, we were fast prisoners at our jailers' discretion. It was her highness who first thought of Grotz's keys.

"They may not open it, Sir Knight of the Rueful Countenance," said she; "but couldn't one be filed down to meet with the requirements? Methinks I have heard of such expediencies ere this."

And, after an hour's labored effort, assisted with Zenia's nail-file and several other impromptu instruments, I at length induced a certain key to be gracious and fit itself to circumstances.

It was about one o'clock in the morning when I essayed my attempt at reconnaissance. Her highness had refused to retire. The dirk I took with me; the revolver I left with her.

"The best life insurance, madam," said I, tendering it; "and the best honor insurance. You will know how to use it?"

"Aye," she whispered, dark-eyed. "God send me no such extremity!"

"God with us, I will return well within the hour," said I. "If not—you will lock this door; here is the key. Then, madam, you must strive to win away——"

"No, no," she whispered strangely, almost fiercely; "do not speak of that. You will, you must, come back—promise me that. Promise." And she lifted her hot eyes to mine.

"Madam," I said, her hand at my lips (its heat parched my tongue), "to serve your highness faithfully always—I ask no more of Heaven."

"And I——" she began; then stopped short and caught her breath. Very

slowly she unfastened a knot of scarlet from her hot, yellow hair, and held it forth with misty eyes.

"These, Sir Knight," she said, her lips trying to smile, "are my colors—courage, faith, loyalty. Take them; wear them. As you do by them, so do you by me."

Again she gave me both her hands, and I felt them tremble strangely as they met mine. She watched me from the door; wide-eyed, very still. In truth, she was fighting down a great emotion. And why not? For self-preservation is the great primal instinct; and the success or failure of my venture spelled her eternal salvation or damnation.

And so, with the Princess Zenia's colors over my heart, thus went I out into the secret highways and byways of the house of mine enemy. I first marked well the location of the room I had but quitted. The swinging lamp was still softly glowing at the corridor's angle, and this chamber door lay some half-dozen feet before you came to the turn. I listened intently, ears at carpet, but not a vestige of sound demanded the attention of my hearing.

I was not entirely without some idea of the location of the rear door I had set out to find. I treasured the map I had mentally sketched the night of our arrival, for I conjectured, with some good reason, that we had entered from the rear—by means of the much-mooted door. Therefore, I had but to reverse our original route to reach it, viz: down a long corridor, a turn to the left; a descent of sixteen steps; another corridor; a descent of twenty steps, a turn to the right, and once more a passage.

I located the first flight of steps without any difficulty. My progress was necessarily exceedingly wary and tedious; ever crouching against the walls; ever starting at unexpected shadows. Grotz's long dirk was in my hand. It would find sanctuary in whoever might discover or attempt to stay me.

My first stage of the journey brought me to a large, gloomy dining-hall finished in weathered oak and dull crimson. A light burned dimly, flickering on the great solitary table and the rows of mournful-looking chairs marshaled stiffly against the walls. A door stood starkly open, giving on another corridor finished in the same color scheme as the dining-hall. By way of it began my second stage of the journey. In due time, without awaking even the echo of my feet, I gained the second flight of steps. These, I remembered, were of stone where the others were softly carpeted. I was justified in believing myself in the lower quarters, possibly leading to the servants' hall and sleeping chambers. Here, possibly, I would have need of all my caution.

I had reached the stairs, listening the while intently, when it suddenly flashed over me that I was being tracked. It was a distinctly uncomfortable sensation, to put it mildly. I had had some small suspicion of this previously, but had dismissed it as absurd. If discovered, why should not my enemies rush me openly? But now there was no gainsaying it, I had caught the same warning—a softly stealing footstep.

I crouched there in the angle where the passage swerved sharply to meet the stairs. I was all in a sweat. Patiently I waited, the dirk ready, for the steps to turn the corner. Moments passed. Finally, as I heard no further herald of the phantom feet, I ventured to poke a cautious head round the angle. The corridor was empty; its only tenants the flickering shadows. Convinced that again had my ears proven me fool, no doubt ably assisted by the tension of my nerves, I gave full heed to the work in hand, and, without more ado, slipped down the steps.

Facing me was the other corridor, flanked by many doors. At my rear it continued for half a dozen yards, then took a sharp turn to the left. But my business was in front. Suddenly the soft, gray unison of a sleepers' chorus greeted me. This was the servants' quarters. "Snore on, O worthies," I abjured, and stole gently to a great door facing me down the vista. It was bolted and barred on the inside. The night was ungenerous, chary of light, but I dimly perceived a narrow path,

smothered in gaunt trees, confronting me through the glass-protected steel.

With deliberation I selected the rear-door key from Grotz's collection, and softly tried it in the lock. It turned easily. My goal had been won with surprisingly little difficulty. As I stood there in the shadows, came a sudden, swift thought: Why not now win my way clear? As a free man I could be of infinitely more assistance to her highness than a prisoner facing a second attempt at freedom.

A few hours and I could lead all Saxonia to her rescue. Perhaps on my second attempt at flight, with her to guard to boot, fortune would prove infinitely less charitable. Undoubtedly, freed from all sentiment, this would be the wisest, most logical course. But then came the memory of her hot eyes as she looked at me, not as a limb of royalty, but as a woman, and her voice as she said: "You will come back? Promise." And if I did not return shortly she would give herself up for lost.

Further, truth to tell, I was loath to face the suspicion of desertion. Might it not be well suggested that I had thought first of my safety, secondly of her rescue? True, she had the revolver, but—— But my term of absence might be just the time for her greatest peril. Thus I marched and countermarched in the morass of hesitancy.

Then, as is generally the way, events suddenly decided matters for me, whether I would or no. The staccato ringing of an electric bell sounded in the corridor. A door opened down the hall, and an old butler, stifling a yawn, shuffled off into the vista, turned an angle, and disappeared. I heard a door open—I heard more. Captain Kienert's high voice, punctuated by the soft purr of little Uncle Boris. My heart jumped. Then the Princess Zenia had been right. Her swift suspicion had been correct. Her pseudo uncle was concerned in her abduction.

From the safe sanctuary of my shadows, a determination cementing within me, I saw the old butler return, and presently emerge with a tray on which were decanters and cigarettes. Evidently an all-night council was under way. Insatiable curiosity gripped me. I must learn what those two master rogues were plotting. It would make worthy listening.

Lost to all but the spur of the moment, I slipped down the hall in the wake of the shuffling butler. It was a reckless move, but I was nothing if not reckless that night. My long, close confinement had set my hunger for action ravenously on edge.

The corridor debouched into a great, wide hall, high wainscoted, deep friezed. I caught the gleam of antlers on the walls. Vaguely, as one discerns in a dream, it came to me that I had seen all this before. Where, I did not know, and I had small time for analytical retrospection. I heard the tinkle of ice against glass; Captain Kienert's high laugh, the gentle rejoinder of Uncle Boris; my nostrils filled with the heavy, languorous odor of Turkish tobacco. A shaft of light showed whence all this issued. I caught a glimpse of the old butler deferentially poising aloft the bottle of Black and White.

Looking about me, another door stood invitingly open on my left. Not waiting to conjecture whether the two rooms connected or no, not greatly caring, desirous only of playing eavesdropper, I slipped into the offered sanctuary.

Then I saw that it was brother to the council-chamber, for a brilliantly lighted transom greeted me. It diffused a somber light about the room. I discerned rows of gun-cases; a great table, a couch. And slowly as my eyes focused these objects, as my mind interpreted their meaning, striving to greet them as former acquaintances, I became aware that they struck me unpleasantly. That leather couch there, for instance, standing in the angle of the wall. Surely I had seen it before, and under no very charming circumstances. And that big chair at the head of the table. And those bucks' antlers over the mantel. And the mahogany cases of twelve gage guns. Surely—surely——

And then, at length, the truth had

flashed home. Once again the couch was tenanted, and from its shadows a prisoner, with his bonds secretly severed, patiently awaited his opportunity to strike. Once again the great armchair was occupied—a white-haired man, owning a lupine mouth and gentle, satiric, clever eyes, watching the smoke of his cigarette curl ceilingward. And at his elbow, head on arms, snored the lax figure of a besotted princeling. Yes, the truth had struck home. Strange as it seemed, almost incredible of belief, I was once again in the gunroom of Heimruh.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE HOHENSTAUFFEN SOIL BASKET.

The closing of a door awakened me to the present. I heard the gentle shuffle of the butler as he passed the door. I remember he was humming softly "The Bonnie, Bonnie Banks of Loch Lomond"; and I thought it odd that I should listen to a Scottish song in so strange a place. At first I owned to a vague desire of facing Captain Kienert and Uncle Boris, and of having our wrongs out man to man. But I repented of this hasty and unintelligent impulse. What could I hope to compass against their armed unity? And, the castle roused, the Princess Zenia would find herself in a worse plight than ever.

The fact that we were in Heimruh put another mask on matters. Our abduction, then, was not the rash act of a reckless, desperate young man, but the cold, wily scheming of a veteran. And such a veteran!

Here the veteran's voice came to me, and I crouched against the door listening.

"And I say she must be found," repeated Uncle Boris, evidently splicing the thread of discourse which the advent of the butler had severed. "You have been gone a week. Is failure always to wait permanently upon your efforts?"

I fancied I could see the amiable captain shrug as he answered lightly: "I have searched diligently and well. But it's a long lane—that gathers no moss."

"A pox on the infernal affair," said Boris petulantly, at length. "Here I have gathered affairs patiently and with much discrimination in my net, when—pouf!—fate gives it a kick, and all is to do over again. True," he continued meditatively, "the chancellor still opposes my accession, offering to produce the legitimate heir within the week. Pah, the last feeble resort of a trapped rogue in a cul-de-sac. But I needs must grant the seven days' stay, for the people are with him. A useless waste of time. There can be but the one ending, and I will make it so. The people," he sneered; "cursed weather-vanes vested with a power they can never use rightly. Now they are all for the Von Buelowes. They grudge the dog the bone he has earned——"

"And the disappearance of her highness works to your ill?" asked Kienert, adroitly leading the other back to the strayed point.

"Of course," said Boris irritably. "Why else should I scour God and his kingdoms? Not for love of the impudent wench—the puling, cream-faced thing. With her absent, with Hugo sick of his wound, in Heimruh's grasp, I would have their doddering old father and Saxonia for my plaything. That is the curse of it. I must poison myself to cure myself—bring her back to oppose me. Fore God, captain, the Fates have run stark mad." And he struck the table violently.

"Aye," said the other, politely deliberate; "but why does the disappearance of her highness effect you so vitally? I have been away on the hunt. I am ignorant what complexion affairs have taken."

"The chancellor," said Boris, swallowing his venom, "insinuates that I instigated the girl's abduction—wily old werwolf that he is. He charges that I am playing a desperate game for Saxonia's alliance. The people are up in arms. It seems they love the chit. And I require the people's support if I am to win my way to the Zollenstein throne. If I am instrumental in uncovering this

mystery, restoring the Princess Zenia, I stamp the chancellor a liar, prove my own innocence, and win both Saxonia's support and the loyalty of her people. The chancellor has me on the hip. He knows that I am totally ignorant of the girl's whereabouts. Fore God, with her connivance, I believe he has created this diversion to block my hand. I cannot force my succession down the roused, angry maws of my subjects. There would be a revolution. France, Germany, would gladly step in, and we would lose all. Von Moltke Hertz would go to that extremity before seeing a Hohenstauffen on the throne."

"I think," said Kienert suavely, "that if the disappearance is a pact between her highness and the chancellor, as you claim it is, they would be too astute to endeavor to conceal her within our domains. Disguised, she could easily win abroad and lie concealed. The same object would be attained with infinitely less danger. For my part, I think the chancellor honest in his anger, his innocence, and that there is small use searching for her. Frankly, I think our princess has eloped——"

"Eloped?" caught up Boris witheringly. "A pox, captain, on your weedy intelligence."

"Well," hummed the other, no whit disturbed, "perhaps you know best. But there was Greystone, for instance. He was her shadow in Paris. He, too, has disappeared. Why not with her?"

"But she would have none of him. Pah!" argued Boris, "she is a girl that wills her own will. That much I stand for her."

"Aye," argued the other dryly; "granted. But why should not the Viscount Greystone fight for a throne? Has any a better right? England, I wager you, would as lief control Saxonia and her revenues as either France or Germany. And the more diplomatically, by the subterfuge of an alliance, the better. His country, unseen, might stand at his back, prompter to a youth's sculduggery. Greystone—and he loves her highness as much as toads can love—could have won away with the girl, and may rule her kingdom through his wife. Once married, I warrant, he would not find it difficult walking to win her regard. Women are all alike. Perhaps he is putting in his probation now before announcing his marriage—and the honeymoon is hardly over."

Boris was silent, digesting this specious argument.

"Pouf!" he snarled at length. "That is a pretty long stretch of the bow, even for you, Kienert. There is some truth in it, but not enough. And Greystone, from what I saw of him—and I can measure men, hark you—was not that cloth of man. Aye, he left me curtly, unexpectedly, but I treasure no animus against him. He was expecting important cablegrams from England. Men of affairs are compulsory scorners of etiquette. No doubt he is in England. And he as good as promised me his support, influence. No, I have small fear from that quarter."

Kienert hummed airily. He was playing a deep, wily, treacherous game. I owned an inkling of it. I had yet to come in full sight of the board, to estimate the stakes. Finally he spoke, idly, smoke in his words.

"And about this legitimate heir—the chancellor's puppet? If he doesn't appear within the week—if Johann, gentle Johann, doesn't appear to claim his own, then you gain the throne without a contest? Faith, the chancellor must be sure of his ground. But—supposing the faithful boy *does* appear—what then?"

"I say he cannot appear," said the other grimly. "Dead children, children that have been under the sod these thirty years or so, do not attain their majority—at least their earthly majority."

"But supposing," argued Kienert lazily, "that the child had not been—er—I mean, died, eh?"

"What a charming hand you are at proposing delightful contingencies," observed Boris, in his gentle, venomous, satirical manner. "If we are supposing, why not suppose that you succeed in discovering the whereabouts of her highness? I fancy that more to the point."

"Undoubtedly — your point," said Kienert equably.

"My points are yours, I think," supplemented the other, dangerously pleasant.

Kienert laughed. "Granted—until they prick."

"How prick? I own a small suspicion that I hold the whip-hand, my friend. I think Austria would pay well for your head, knew she where it lay."

"Faith," said the other insolently, "I think Zollenstein would pay well for the proof of your bastardy, knew she where it lay."

There followed silence. I heard the older man swallow twice.

"You dog," he said quite pleasantly. "Biting the hand that housed you. I know you well of old, you kennel scum. You must be sure of your ground. I may lose a kingdom, but you your life. I have watched your rabies long. At last you have showed your fangs. It is your life or my peace." His voice shrilled out savagely. "You will never leave this room, Captain Kienert. Don't move a hand, or I'll drill you——"

"I haven't the slightest intention of moving," drawled the other, the essence of insolence; "and you may as well put up that abominable gun, my amiable friend. I am no fool—I think you grant me that. You kill me, and you not only lose the kingdom, but put your fine neck in a halter as surely as the devil favors us both. You are right. I *am* sure of my ground—very sure—or I wouldn't have spoken. Now I share the whip-hand, understand? My days of serfdom are ended. I can make or break you. I prefer the latter, because your fortunes are mine. Selfish instincts, but necessarily loyal. We are needful to each other."

Absolute silence.

"I think," said Boris at length, speaking slowly, as one might who takes counsel with himself, "that I will listen to your argument. Speak truly, for, if not, this gun will answer for me, and shortly. Begin. What do you hold?"

"For one," said Kienert quietly, "I know that Johann von Buelowe, the legtimate heir, was never killed."

"So," commented the other softly, the slight quaver in his voice the only sign of emotion, "'was never killed.' You speak bluntly."

"We are blunt men. We have done blunt things in our time. Why need we equivocate with ourselves?"

Boris considered.

"And your proofs?" he asked finally, grimly.

"Faith, the most irrefutable of all—he is alive at this hour."

"U-m-m," purred Boris.

"More," continued Kienert dryly; "it is he whom the chancellor desires to place upon the throne—no puppet, no play-actor, but the last of the Von Buelowes himself."

"Charming, charming," murmured the veteran through his set teeth. "And where is this prince? Where is he? I desire to meet him—oh, yes, vastly." And he laughed venomously. "Out with it, man. Already time has us by the neck. Where is he, I say?"

"That, I might suggest, remains my knowledge—for the present."

"I see, I see," murmured Boris, gently venomous. "First you wish your price, eh? Very good, very good. But of course I do not pay for undelivered merchandise. It is bad policy—with some people. Your proofs, my mercantile friend."

"Faith, let us first draw up an agreement," hummed the captain, greatly deliberate. "I am in the same fix as yourself—neither do I deliver merchandise for undelivered money—with some people."

Here the veteran broke into a storm of impatience, freely sprinkled with bad verbiage.

"We sit haggling like two fishwives, when our fortunes—nay, more—may be shivering in the balance. What are your terms? Out with them. I accede to anything within reason. The Jewish blood is not in me. What is the price? Spit it out cleanly."

"I want," said Kienert, brutally frank, "the Princess Zenia. Nothing more, nothing less."

Boris drew in his breath sharply. Then he laughed.

"Faith, your modesty is on a par with your intelligence; only your good taste is supreme. You are aiming at the moon. Granted your suit, what influence have I over that self-willed girl? Tush, come to earth. Name your price."

"I have named it," affirmed Kienert doggedly, a new note in his voice. "And with me on the throne of Saxonia, as your ally, we can shape the twin kingdoms between us."

"Eh?" breathed the other softly. Then: "Aye, aye, there lies some truth in that—but not enough. Not enough, my ambitious friend. And there is first to catch your rabbit. And, granting that" — with pointed brutality — "she would as liefer slit that white throat of hers than marry with you."

"There are ways," hummed Kienert placidly. "Grant me your sanction, support, my friend, and I will shoulder the rest. Then you and I will be knit with other than the bonds of mutual gain."

"You seem to have studied well your ground. And"—satirically—"what of Greystone, eh?"

The captain laughed loudly.

"That was a hypothetical case. I wished to show you how easy it would be for one to force a maid's hand—now I wish to take the place of the viscount."

Silence came. Then, finally, from the older man: "And so you knew that her highness had not won away with Greystone, eh?"

"I know nothing—other than what it may pay me to know. But this I offer gratuitously: I am aware of the princess' whereabouts, and, your support given, can lead you to her."

"You—have known—all this time—where she lay concealed?" asked Boris, with heavy deliberation, as if doubting his ears. "And I put to the pinch of fear. Fore God, captain, you are a more capable villain than I ever owned you. There will be reckoning for this. Aye, reckoning."

"I take it as a compliment," said Kienert, no whit afraid. "I try to make myself absolutely necessary to you—it insures living at peace for us both."

"Peace, peace," snarled the other, suddenly venomous. "I've a mind to shatter your cowardly head—if I only dared. You have me on the hip. You know it. Damn you for a master rogue!"

"I learned in a good school—under a capable master," hummed his amiable pupil.

"And I warrant," said Boris, ignoring this tribute, "you had a dirty hand in the stealing away of her highness. Aye, I grant you that. A shrewd guess, eh? and one worthy of your villainy."

"I may know and I may not. All depends upon you," returned the other, stifling a yawn. "I might suggest that it is no time for recriminations."

Came silence. When the veteran at length spoke his voice was as mild as milk.

"Well, well," he purred, "a truce to animus. You have taken me by the flank, and, truth to tell, after the chagrin of the moment, I do not hold an opponent's astuteness against him. My mistake," gently sorrowful, "was in supposing you my friend. However, let us form a new alliance based upon mutual aggrandizement. There is much justice in your demands. You will be my ally. We will see what can be done. We will see."

And I knew, as truly as I knelt there by the door, little Uncle Boris was plotting how best to murder the captain after sucking him dry. It was his pleasant way. And I fancied that Kienert, no fool, suspected also. But if he did he gave no sign. It was rogue against rogue with a vengeance.

"Certainly," added Boris frankly, "we cannot deal each other a backhanded stroke. As you say, we are necessary to each other—in that lies our strength and safety. Now at best we can only pass our words. Mutual trust is requisite. These will be our bonds. This I swear. I therefore promise to do all in my power to see you safely wedded to her highness, you, in turn, assisting me in putting this

upstart prince out of the reckoning, and, in due time, furnishing Saxonia's support. In short, we will be one, eh, my friend? And there is my hand upon it."

"Agreed," came Kienert's smooth voice. "Mutual gain, mutual fear, is the best trust." He laughed. "Now, to begin with, I have run across—Betta." This evidently was an astounding piece of information, for he paused impressively while Boris cleared his throat at great length and then asked sharply:

"Betta? Then she did not die? Oh, the slimy Jezebel! False as her sex. Ah, my pretty maid, wait until I can call our reckoning! Treachery, treachery! A merry, merry total. Where is she? Where is she, my friend?" somewhat recovering his composure.

"Here, in Zollenstein. I can put my hand upon her when necessary. Thinking I was your enemy——"

"You mean knowing you were," supplemented the other.

"Faith, that is all past. It doesn't greatly matter. To be short, she searched me out and offered me the information. I promised her indemnity for her sins. It seems that instead of killing the child as ordered, her heart turned soft for sake of the dead and gone mother, and, keeping it by her as long as practicable, at length sent it off to a school, ignorant of its name or heritage. She paid for its tuition and board as long as possible, but at length it came to a point where she needs must fight for her own maintenance, and she lost all track or knowledge of the child. You see, her payments stopped."

"What payments?" demanded Boris.

"The chancellor's," returned Kienert dryly. "It seems he knew from the start the whereabouts of the outlawed heir, suborned Betta, hoping that he could bring the boy to his own in time. But she played him false as well."

"So, let me fully understand. You mean that that Jezebel, paid by us—by me, rather, if you prefer it so—accepted funds from my enemy the chancellor? Betrayed us? Ha! I thought she feared me more than that, the dog!"

"Evidently she did fear," returned Kienert, "but she also favored the child. She attempted a neutral course; sent her charge adrift so that he could be of no use to the chancellor and would cease to be a menace to you. After many years' wandering, an exile, the call of home grew to be an obsession, and at length Zollenstein drew her like a magnet."

"Horses will draw her before I'm done with her," observed Boris pleasantly. "But how do you know her charge, the young prince, is not dead?" he finished sharply. "When they disappeared so suddenly they were recognized as dead—devoured in the wave of cholera that swept all England. Our agents swore to this."

"They were mistaken," answered the other. "They did not die. The boy was with Betta until six years of age or so. You thought him dead at two. And Betta did not leave England until he was in his teens. Then, fearing that the growing boy would learn her secret, she fled beyond the chancellor's ken."

"Yes, yes," agreed Boris impatiently, "but that is not my question. How knows she that the boy is not dead these twenty years or so? Did not die in the meantime? Answer me that."

"Because she saw him only the other day in—Zollenstein."

"What?" whispered the veteran rogue at this blow in the face. "What? Here in Zollenstein? Fore God is it as bad as that?" Then savagely: "She lies, she lies—she must lie. I say she lies in her throat. The boy is dead. It is a black plot of the chancellor's. They can foist no gallow's spawn upon me." Then calmer: "And this is why Von Moltke Hertz asks a stay? Already he fancies his hand on the heir, eh? Why then this waiting? Is it baiting me? Ha! is that it?" He laughed. He was in a desperately bitter, evil humor; one it would be dangerous work to cross. Suddenly, unexpectedly pushed to the wall, confronted with his old, abortive crimes, he was fighting, spitting like a tiger-cat.

"That is our salvation," said Kienert equably, sure of his ground. "The

chancellor, so swears Betta, has not been told of the heir's identity. And though I know for years his agents have been searching him out, I fancy nothing but failure has waited upon their combined efforts. In fact, I know this. It is all bluff with him. He hopes against reason that the missing Johann von Buelowe will be unearthed before the seven days are up."

"But the prince himself?" stormed Boris. "The prince himself, man. Have you wits gone maundering, or has this web of treachery sent mine begging? I say the prince himself. You say that Betta, that hoary Jezebel, has seen him in Zollenstein. What of that? What of that, eh? Is the chancellor blind, deaf? I warrant not. Is the prince an idiot? God send him so."

"And I say," returned Kienert, his patience fluttering, "that the chancellor is ignorant of the prince's identity. And Johann von Buelowe does not know his father's people, his own birth, from Adam. The truth speaks here, believe it or no. And yet I say his presence here is premeditated. Listen! Patience! This, the true prince, is the man Von Moltke Hertz, in all ignorance, wished to place upon the throne until such time as the real heir, as he thought, appeared to contest his own. Thus, in that event, the last of the Von Buelowes would have ruled his own people, believing himself but an impostor. Do you understand? It was all the working of chance. Looking about him for a suitable puppet, the chancellor put his hand on the right man without knowing it. Knew you fate ever to play so strange a trick? But it is the truth. I swear to it."

"Fore God! Fore God!" muttered Boris, almost inarticulate, "my head will not credit my ears. The true prince, say you? They hit upon the right man by chance after all else had failed! So! So! And now fate plays into our hands at the eleventh hour. But it is not too late. I have been groping in the dark while you have been working in the full light of day. And where is this last of the Von Buelowes? A look, a word, and we are damned forever. There is not a moment to lose. Show me to him, and I am yours to command, my friend, to the last extremity. Now I can settle the score, strike out the cursed brood, beyond all cavil. Strike! Strike!"

"Aye! strike," agreed Kienert softly, "but I strike first. To-night I wed the Princess Zenia. Then the last of the Von Buelowes is yours to do what you will with. Is it agreed?"

Boris blew out his breath in a great whistle.

"Wed to-night? Ah—u-m-m." Certainly he had not expected this short circuit of time. "Ah—yes—u-m-m. But where is your rabbit? And why not to business first and to sport later? Eh, why not?"

"Fine goods will keep, 'tis true," said Kienert placidly. "But, a bird in the hand—is the noblest work of God. And I have safely snared it—she lies under this very roof. What say you to that, my friend? Lies under this very roof. And, more, Father Roche is ready to perform the ceremony in the chapel."

The veteran strummed violently on his chair and caught his breath.

"So—so," he murmured softly, "lies under this very roof. Under this very roof," repeating it like a litany, "lies under this very roof. Oh, you clever, clever dog! Ha, ha, the last place I would have ever expected to find her. The last place I would have thought—under this very roof. Ha, ha! In my own house all the time. So—so, the rat worked to good purpose while the cat was away, eh? You have it all cut and dried, ready for the sun. Father Roche in the chapel waiting. Ah—yes—u-m-m. Father Roche, the chapel—all. Even the consent of her highness, eh? Even the consent of her highness?"

"Faith, I don't ask it," hummed Kienert. "Once wedded, I warrant she will be docile enough. Come, come, is it agreed? Yes or no?"

Boris hummed and hawed, softly rubbing his hands together, anon breaking into a forced chuckle. "Clever, clever," he would murmur. And then: "Father Roche! The chapel—all! Under my own roof all the time! So—so!"

And I knew full well that he was

hastily revising his plans of treachery. Kienert, knowing his man, had struck hard, suddenly, leaving the other no time in which to turn his slimy self. Finally, said Boris gently:

"What proof have I that you can put your hand upon the prince, eh? What proof? Is faith, is trust, is assistance all to be upon my side? I warrant not."

The other laughed, supremely sure of his ground. Certainly he had studied it well.

"I promise you," he said forcefully, "that five minutes after the ceremony you can face the last of the Von Buelowes. If I lie—well, there is still the bullet you have stayed. My life is forfeit."

"Five minutes?" echoed Boris huskily. "Five minutes? Fore God, captain, are you man or devil?"

"A little of both. Johann von Buelowe also lies under your roof." And the red-haired captain broke out into a laugh, the laugh which greatly resembled the neighing of a horse.

Boris' chair pushed back.

"Kienert," he said, with the utmost feeling, sincerity—and seldom have I heard so much emotion and admiration in a man's voice—"your brains commend you to me greatly. Aye! greatly. Yours is the master mind. I do not seek to know the formula—I am content with the result. The last of the Von Buelowes under this roof? Ha, then, by the head of John the Baptist, we hold the twin kingdoms there—there, mark you, in our hands, to do with as we care to. Your hand, Kienert,—for this admirable coup. Yours to the death. To the death, sir. And now for the night's work. Ho, for the wedding-march and the Von Buelowe's requiem. Father Roche, I warrant you, will have two services to perform." And he cackled in high glee.

And then, before I could gain my well-stiffened knees, Kienert's self-congratulatory rejoinder abruptly took a horrible, ghastly finish. There came the shattering blast of a revolver-shot—a cough, a muttered oath, a curious little choke, and finally, after a fearsome moment of harrowing suspense, the crash of a body, fighting hard against its fall—fighting its way to the floor.

That I could only guess at the despicable act of treachery that had played itself out behind the closed door rendered it but the more terrible. The acrid fumes of powder seeped through the cracks and filled my lungs. I felt nauseated—physically, mentally, morally. As I staggered to my feet, blindly groping, there came the gentle, satiric soliloquy of little Uncle Boris:

"He fights best who fires first. Aye! lie there, you crimson-tufted buzzard. You thought to teach your master. Sucked dry—sucked dry. A throne you wanted? Aye! the devil's. Sucked dry. He, he, he!" And he dribbled away into a mirthless chuckle. It was fit victory for the master rogue.

CHAPTER XVIII.

STUFF THAT DREAMS ARE MADE OF.

Hasty, shuffling footsteps were coming down the corridor. It was the lone answer to the call of the bullet. Standing in the shadows of the great gun-room, I saw the old butler, wide-eyed, mouth agape, drift sleepily past; heard him knock at the door, his tremulous query and Boris' satiric reply. He was Heimruh's only law. Sufficient unto himself.

I had not found myself as yet. The facts I had learned had had no time for assimilation. I was suffering from verbal indigestion. I must brave the chance of the castle's awakening and win the Princess Zenia's room. Besides all else, I would have need of a woman's intuition, quick perception, to help me translate the night's proceedings. Events had taken a heady, vicious turn.

With the duet of Boris and the butler in my ears, I slipped safely into the hall, and, after a great period of suspense, during which my heart was on the tip of my tongue, at length reached Zenia's chamber. The door was unlocked. And I could not censure her lack of caution, though it was long

after the hour agreed upon for my return.

"Who—who is that?" she whispered tremulously as I entered. All was dark.

"Sir Mortimer," I bandied lightly. "The night brings home the knight."

"I am here in my room," she whispered. "Come to me. Tell me all. We dare not use a light. I—I could not retire. I thought something dreadful must have happened, and yet I could not bear to lock the door against your possible return. And—and wasn't there a shot? Vaguely I heard it. A shot in the night, amid the silence—waiting here alone in the dark—thinking those horrible thoughts. I knew you had no revolver." She was somewhat unnerved, as was but natural. After all, despite her usual aplomb, she was only a girl.

I came and sat beside her in the dark. We dared hardly speak above a breath. She was in the old, well-remembered rocker by the barred window, and I accepted a footstool at her knee, which she mutely designated with a dainty, restless slipper. The proximity, the dear, dear intimacy, though I am no sentimentalist, caught me by the throat and silently I fought back the passion fomenting within.

As briefly, as dispassionately, as logically as possible, I recited the night's adventures. She listened, absorbed, offering no comment. Once or twice as my voice slid the scale through sheer excitement, she cautioned me, and ventured a soft, warm palm on my lips. Once or twice the outlying tendrils of her hair brushed my face, and the perfume eat its way through me, and I had the fight to fight over again. She was very near. I could see the curve of her cheek, the rise of her soft, warm throat, the swell of her bosom. And yet I betrayed no sign. For that I think I deserve credit, for we cannot help our feelings. Once I thought that some of my overmastering passion had won itself to my voice. If it did, she gave no evidence.

"And so you see, your highness," I perorated, "Boris won what information he required—the whereabouts of the prince—and killed Kienert in cold blood. And, according to the captain, Johann von Buelowe must be concealed here."

She was silent, pleating her silk-clad knees in well-remembered fashion. Every trick, every mannerism, I had learned by heart.

"And," I continued hurriedly, "if we do not wish to see murder done, if we strike for Zollenstein and the right, we must, by hook or crook, get between Boris and the last of the Von Buelowes. I am ready and willing to take the risk."

And still she was silent. "It is difficult," she ventured quietly at length, "to distinguish between truth and lies when past masters are at work. How can you say what truth was in the captain's words? What if they were but a specious snare to gain the Duke Boris' consent, support, to my marriage?"

"But he offered his life as forfeit," I protested. "I think, for once, Kienert was sincere."

"Aye," she agreed whimsically, "until he could afford to be insincere. Mark you, his life was in the balance. It was a lie, a good lie, or be shot down where he sat. And still," she meditated, "knowing the man, I do not think he would have brought matters to such a pass without knowing his way out. I think," she concluded slowly, "that, his purposes served, Kienert would have dealt out the same medicine to Boris. His mistake was in being forestalled. There could be no such word as trust between two such master rogues. And, don't you see," dryly, "that, granting the captain's statement true, that *you,* Sir Mortimer, must logically be the missing heir presumptive? Don't you see that? Doesn't everything point its finger at *you?*" She laughed whimsically.

But I sat very still, hugging tight my knees and staring into the dark. Aye, she had pointed out what I had vaguely understood.

"Don't you see," she began again, "that you fulfil all the requirements? It accounts for your treatment here. Whom else could Kienert put his hand upon in five minutes? And he but returned to-day, mark you! He had not

yet learned of your supposed escape. He was all confident in your security. He thought he had you fast." Here her voice trailed away, and she laughed strangely. "Where is my reasoning leading me to?" said she, greatly perplexed. "Let me see. If Kienert spoke the truth, then you—you—but it is absurd, ridiculous. He *must* have lied to save his skin. And yet—and yet he did not kill you out of hand. That argues a motive. Let me see. Ah! Oh, I have it. I have it," she whispered hotly, bending forward in her excitement, until her lips almost brushed my hair, "I have it at last. I have it. Listen! Bend nearer. There. He wished to palm you off to Boris as the heir presumptive. To throw you as bait. Do you see? Aye, that was it! To let him kill you for the last of the Von Buelowes and Boris would never be the wiser. Kienert would have gutted his revenge on you, gained the other's support, and, at leisure, undoubtedly would have killed him if he stood in the way of any further designs. Aye! that is it. A sound solution of the whole tangle. And the fact that you really do resemble the Von Buelowes would have made it all the better. How is that for woman's wit?" And she laughed softly.

But I was silent, hugging my knees. Woman's wit? Aye! but where did man's come in? She saw but the picture dimly—I had viewed its making. I could not forget Kienert's words: "Searching about them, they put their hand upon the right man by accident." Her highness did not know that I had been picked for the chancellor's puppet—or was it accident? Truth it seemed so, but—I was groping, groping.

And then that story of the heir presumptive, the little boy, which Kienert had related. I would have been an utter fool not to have seen how it paralleled my life—matched it in every particular. Little by little—slight incidents, seeming idle words—came to me there in the dark to help make the pattern whole. Even the Princess Zenia's remarks that day concerning how I resembled her mother and her brother at certain times. And yet, of course, I was not quite fool enough to believe it all. It was too great, too mighty. I knew the wonderful power of coincidence.

Yes, the whole thing was absurd, utterly ridiculous. I to be the Princess Zenia's cousin? I to be heir presumptive to the throne of Zollenstein? I born to the ermine and scepter? I, the outcast, the puppet, the play-actor, the adventurer, the nameless, homeless wanderer; he whom England's jails awaited.

I mentally reviewed my life. Aye! it was likely, very likely indeed. And yet the momentary, fragmentary, idle dreams had been over-sweet. To have found kin, name—everything, even in one's dreams is wonderfully beautiful. For a second I had felt my heart leap high, my pulse throb fast, the blood surge to my head at all the amazing possibility, the sheer, maddening, ecstasy of the moment. Aye! it was a merry, merry jest of the Fates.

The tide receded and left me the old, scarred wreck high up on the sands of chronic hopelessness, my companions the battered hulks of fellow failures. Indeed, the entire fabric suddenly struck me as so absurdly incongruous that I threw back my head and laughed aloud.

"Hush!" whispered Zenia, at my elbow, roused from her reverie. "What is it?"

"Nothing," said I. "I was dreaming—dreaming a fool's dream."

TO BE CONTINUED.

Tales of the Lost Legion

By Francis Whitlock

V.—THE TRIBULATIONS OF THOMAS TINKLER

(A Novelette)

THERE was an expression of perplexity on the face of Mr. Jabez Cooper as he sat in his luxurious office; for, strange to say, he was at a loss for a man. The peculiar qualities which he required in a certain class of his employees were not to be found haphazard, and it was a case where those peculiar qualifications were imperative. Many tempting offers of opportunities for speculative investment had of late been made to the capitalist, and consequently the members of the Lost Legion were congenially employed in different corners of the world, and the restaurant of Madame Hortense, where his agents were ordinarily to be found, was practically deserted.

Mr. Albert Jenkins was subsisting on quinin pills and canned goods in a Central American swamp; instilling into the minds of a band of ragged revolutionists that the rifles sent to them on trust by Mr. Cooper must be paid for out of the revenues which the dictator of the moment was reluctant to relinquish; Mr. Halliday was somewhere near the headwaters of the Amazon, negotiating for the exclusive right to gather rubber in a territory where previous envoys had been converted into pincushions for poisoned arrows; and Mr. Samuel Simpkins had been persuaded to interrupt his honeymoon to undertake a little matter concerning the escape of certain Russians whom the czar had deported to an undesirable residence in Siberia.

Mr. Richard Redgreave was the only representative of the adventurous society left in New York; but as he was under the care of the surgeons in the New York Hospital, who were attempting to remodel his countenance into some resemblance to humanity, he was not available. Some six months earlier he had gone to Borneo; endeavoring, at the suggestion of Mr. Cooper, to locate the origin of the gold in the nose rings of a certain tribe of head-hunters. Unfortunately, he neglected to turn around three times and cross his fingers when he returned to his room after a piece of forgotten equipment after he had once started, and the hoodoo which that negligence invited stuck to him like a porous plaster. He found the head-hunters; but they also found him, and, contrary to their custom, contented themselves with retaining his ears and nose as souvenirs instead of adding his entire head to their collection. Such little accidents were always to be expected in the careers of members of the Lost Legion, and they were duly estimated in paying for their services; but Mr. Jabez Cooper had no room in his employment for men who feared either danger or death.

Brave men there are a-plenty in the world, as Mr. Cooper recognized; but mere personal bravery without the rarer qualities of absolute fidelity, fertility of resource, and indefatigable perseverance, was of no value to him. He never concealed the danger of his missions from his employees; but he was always careful to impress upon them that dead men were of no use to him, while the report of an intelligent live one might be of inestimable value.

"And that's just the reason I'm liable

to lose one of the best opportunities I have had in many a day," he grumbled, as he realized that his most trustworthy lieutenants were all beyond reach. "I suppose that if I put a four-line ad in the 'Help Wanted—Male,' column, I should be overrun with applicants who would express their willingness to risk their lives for dollars; but the chances are that my dollars would run the greater risk."

Mr. Cooper had unconsciously allowed himself to grumble audibly, so absorbed was he in trying to find a way out of his difficulty; quite forgetting that he was not alone. He was reminded of the fact that he had been so indiscreet by a question in a feminine voice.

"Is it absolutely necessary that a man should fill the position?" asked Miss Kitty Vennar, his confidential stenographer, and Mr. Cooper looked at her, his eyes opened wide in astonishment. It was not an unattractive face nor figure that he stared at, and as he remembered the experiences of some of his employees on previous missions a grim smile came to his lips when he tried to imagine her under similar conditions.

"I reckon that even a man would find his work cut out for him, young woman," he answered. "It's about that fool love-affair of young Hawkins. You know the circumstances and the figure he has named if I can get the girl safely out of the sultan's dominions. If I'm not mistaken, you also heard him enumerate the difficulties which stood in the way of locating her and smuggling her out after she is found."

Miss Vennar nodded her pretty head in assent, and Cooper, again smiled grimly.

"I thought that your speed on the typewriter fell off while he was telling me his tale of woe," he said, with a touch of sarcasm in his voice. "However, you heard so much that you may as well know it all, and, perhaps, you can make some suggestion which will enable me to help the young man out—and, incidentally, reap the reward of considerable proportions."

Miss Vennar nodded; she had been in the employ of Mr. Cooper long enough to understand that he believed in being entirely just to J. Cooper before being generous to others; and the capitalist cleared his throat impressively.

"Young Hawkins, as you are probably aware, was born with a hall-marked silver spoon in his mouth," he continued. "The fortune which he inherited went well into the seven figures before striking the decimal point; but there didn't seem to be any particular excuse for his living. He wasn't fitted for business, but his family had a pull; so he got a berth in the Diplomatic Corps. He couldn't do much harm there, especially in the place they sent him; for he was appointed as an attaché to Constantinople. Our principal exports to Turkey are missionaries, whom the Turks convert into martyrs, and our imports undesirable aliens who settle at Coney Island, and the business of our minister is to listen to the sultan's hard-luck stories when he tries to touch him for an indemnity. That didn't leave much for Hawkins to do; so he promptly got into trouble.

"Being young and inexperienced, that trouble naturally took the form of a woman, and I understand that in that neck of woods they settle their woman scrapes out of hand—the woman disappears and the man has a coroner sit on him. In Hawkins' case they made an exception; the woman disappeared, all right, all right; but Hawkins managed to get across the frontier. As you may have remarked, he's young and callow, and don't know when he's well off. I believe that there are several Turkish gentlemen waiting to do things to him if he returns; but he's still hankering after the girl. All he knows about what became of her is that a couple of eunuchs with very sharp swords interfered when he was whispering soft nothings over the garden wall, and he had to run for it; while the squeals that came from the other side of the fence convinced him that she had troubles of her own. You heard the figure which he mentioned as the reward for get-

ting her out—her name is Bibi, I believe—and if I could get hold of the right man to undertake the job, I'd be willing to make it worth his while."

"Then, Mr. Cooper, I'm your man," exclaimed Miss Vennar determinedly. "There are lots of things which I could not do; but this is an affair where a woman would be quite as useful as a man. If the remains of Miss Bibi have not been sewn up in a sack and thrown in the Bosporus, I'll find her, and, what's more, I'll get her out."

Her employer looked at her, at first incredulously; but as he noted the expression of determination in her pretty eyes, the straight line of the compressed lips, and the aggressiveness of the little, rounded chin, he realized that she was serious.

"By thunder, I believe you would!" he said admiringly. "I've half a mind to try you, anyway."

Miss Vennar apparently regarded the matter as settled, for she quietly shoved his check-book toward him.

"I suppose it will be the ordinary arrangement," she said calmly. "An advance to cover necessary expenses and the payment for services upon delivery of the goods?"

Mr. J. Cooper scratched his head thoughtfully, and then took up his pen.

"Y-e-s," he answered hesitatingly. "I don't know whether I should let you try this, though. What is it—you're not disappointed in love, or anything of that kind that makes you want to commit suicide, are you?"

"Mr. Cooper, I want the money—and I'm tired of living in a hall bedroom," answered Miss Vennar hastily; and, satisfied with the answer, which to him seemed all-sufficient, Mr. Cooper wrote the check without noticing that a telltale blush betrayed how nearly he had hit the mark with his random question.

II.

Until Miss Kitty Vennar embarked on the French liner the following morning, she hardly appreciated that she was, in fact, also embarked upon one of the enterprises usually entrusted to the masculine members of the adventurous society of which her appointment made her ex-officio a member.

In her capacity of confidential secretary to Mr. Cooper she had known more or less of the peculiar missions on which her masculine confrères had been despatched, and it had been her duty on more than one occasion to take down curt letters of sympathy to the relatives of deceased employees who had failed to make good; but even the recollection of the harrowing details of their untimely endings which she had written did not damp her enthusiasm as the steamer pulled away from the pier.

Perhaps there was just a lingering suspicion of regret in her mind as she waved farewell to the young man who looked at her so wistfully from the end of the long dock; but that particular young man had been trying of late, and she trusted that during her absence he might realize that her charms were superior to those of that red-headed girl hussy who had made him waver in his allegiance to Miss Vennar.

"I'll bet that red-head would never take on a contract like this," she exclaimed triumphantly when she, at last, realized that she was fairly started on the voyage which might end in any sort of disaster. "She nearly had hysterics and upset the whole boarding-house just because there was a mouse in her room the other night—and that's strange, because she's a cat herself. I wonder what she'd do if she was going to run all sorts of chances with Bluebeards and daggers and things?"

Miss Vennar had not spoken aloud; but the young man who approached her as she leaned over the rail, watching Mr. Tinkler's face until she could no longer distinguish the features, stopped and looked at her incredulously.

"What! Not really! This can't be possible!" he exclaimed, and she turned, recognizing the youthful and not altogether unattractive face as that of Mr. Q. Archibald Hawkins, upon whose business she was traveling. He was attired in a faultless traveling-suit, and had already donned yachting-cap and shoes.

"Why, Miss Vennar, this is an unexpected plèasure," he said cordially. "I had no idea that we were to be fellow passengers."

"Nor had I, Mr. Hawkins," she answered, a little severely. "I understood from Mr. Cooper that you were to remain quietly in New York and leave this affair entirely in my hands. It is certainly a case where too many cooks will spoil the broth, and this isn't fair."

The young man looked at her with a puzzled expression on his face for a moment and then gave a whistle of astonishment.

"What's that? Too many cooks—remain in New York—leave in your hands?" he stammered. "Great Scott, Miss Vennar! you don't mean to tell me that the old pirate has sent *you* out on this job?"

"My employer, Mr. Cooper, has most certainly entrusted me with a piece of business which, I believe, you placed in his hands—why not?" she demanded icily, drawing herself up proudly to make her five feet four inches as impressive as possible.

Hawkins looked at her and wagged his head helplessly.

"Why not!" he exclaimed, when he recovered sufficiently to speak. "There are about ten thousand reasons why not; but the first and most important is that I positively refuse to stand for it."

Miss Vennar added at least half an inch to her stature by raising her Louis XV. heels from the deck, which brought the top of her head on a level with his scarf-pin, and looked up at him defiantly.

"Mr. Hawkins, have you ever made your home in a hall bedroom of a third-rate boarding-house?" she asked, and when he laughingly admitted that the industry of his forefathers had spared him that necessity, she continued: "Then you don't know how little joy there is in life. That is how I have lived for the last three years, and I'm tired of it. You come to Mr. Cooper with a straight business proposition. You do not risk a cent of your money, for you pay nothing unless he is successful. He, on the contrary, makes a considerable investment in the belief that he has some one who can earn the reward for him. I see a chance to break away from that hall bedroom and accept his offer. Then you appear on the scene and try to upset all of our arrangements, and I call it mean."

Perhaps there was just a little tremor in her voice and a threatening moisture in her pretty eyes when she finished the speech which she had commenced so defiantly, and Hawkins, who was a susceptible youth, felt decidedly uncomfortable.

"But, I say—oh, hang it all! look here, Miss Vennar, this thing is impossible," he protested. "You don't know what you're up against when you talk of going to Constantinople on this business."

"I know what I'm up against if I don't," she answered determinedly. "Anything unpleasant which can happen out there would be the lesser of two evils, and I'm going to see it through. You have nothing to say about it, anyway. You have nothing to do with it, except to see that the money is ready when I get Miss Bibi out of Turkey."

During the voyage to Havre Mr. Q. A. Hawkins and Miss Kitty Vennar saw a great deal of each other, and many and strenuous were the arguments concerning the mission she had undertaken which they indulged in as they walked the broad promenade-deck, lounged in steamer-chairs, or leaned together over the rail. The girl finally came to encourage his objections; realizing that every argument he advanced supplied her with information which might be of value in the future; but nothing which he could say had the slightest influence upon her in the way which he intended. It was not until the customs formalities had been overcome at Havre and they were seated in a compartment of the special steamer train for Paris that he realized that she had been playing with him and that nothing which he had said had influenced her even to think of abandoning the dangerous piece of work which she had undertaken.

"Confound it, Kit!—I mean Miss Vennar; I feel about as large as a canceled two-cent stamp when I look at you," he said ruefully. "Here I am, a fairly husky specimen of a man, and there you are, a little, frail slip of a woman. I am free to confess that I didn't waste any time in getting on the far side of the Turkish frontier, and that I'm not hankering to get back on the near side; but you go about it as if you were going to a pink tea. Maybe it's because you don't realize all the trouble that's waiting for any one who fools with the peculiar institution of the Moslem harem; but, just the same, I'm not proud of myself. It's this confounded money, which I never earned and don't know the value of, which is tempting you to run all these risks, and I'll be hanged if I'll stand by and see you make a martyr of yourself!"

Miss Vennar looked him over critically, and there was something in her expression which did not increase his mental estimate of himself.

"Now, see here, Mr. Hawkins," she said coolly. "I couldn't shake you on the steamer, because it would have been too long a swim. The value which you place on yourself has nothing to do with this matter, for I believe your signature at the bottom of a check will be good to carry out the arrangement you made with Mr. Cooper, who is the only man I recognize in this transaction. To be perfectly frank, when I heard you telling your story to him in New York, I sized you up as worth just about as much as the price-mark you have put on yourself now. After talking with you on the steamer and hearing the full history of the case, I have mentally removed you from the bargain-counter, for I realize that it wouldn't have done Miss Bibi any good and would have meant your conversion into mince-meat if you had put up a fight instead of making a run for it. That does not alter the fact that you did have to run and that your usefulness is over, however, and you may just as well understand, first as last, that until it comes to paying the money when I deliver the goods you simply don't happen, and I am personally conducting this rescue-party. It would have been far better if you had remained in New York; but since you are here, I shall make use of you to help me get my outfit in Paris, and then I'll say au revoir until I come back with Miss Bibi."

"No, you won't," answered Hawkins obstinately. "I am beginning to appreciate that I might as well have saved my breath as to have argued with you; but I'll be hanged if I'll let you go out there alone! They can't do any more than kill me, but I'm going with you."

"Mr. Hawkins, that wouldn't be proper," exclaimed Miss Vennar, blushing. "This little matter of abducting Miss Bibi is business, pure and simple, and nobody can take any exception to it; but you know that it would cause talk if we should travel about together without a chaperon."

"Hang it all, I'll hire a dozen of 'em!" exclaimed Hawkins irritably. "I don't know who has anything to say about it; but if it'll make you feel any easier we'll take 'em along."

"There's Tom Tinkler, you know," suggested Miss Vennar, becoming suddenly interested in the view from the car-window.

"No, I don't know," answered Hawkins quickly. "What has the gentleman with the musical name got to do with it?"

At that particular moment Mr. Thomas Tinkler really occupied a very small part of Miss Vennar's thoughts. After the luxury of the steamer passage, which the experience, acquaintance, and affluence of Hawkins had made particularly agreeable, the atmosphere of the establishment where Mr. Tinkler occupied the proud position of star boarder seemed very remote, and his personality, which had impressed her because he was the largest toad in that small puddle, seemed lacking in attractiveness; but the note of contempt in Hawkins' voice and manner irritated her, and she hastened to inform him that he was her particular "gentleman friend."

"Confound him! I don't care if he's your whole family," answered Hawkins,

and feminine intuition warned Miss Vennar that his vehemence signified more than defiance of possible criticism. "This is a straight business proposition, and——"

"Exactly!" she interrupted triumphantly. "I am glad that you appreciate that at last. Everbody who knows anything about it realizes that you are fairly pining away with love of Miss Bibi, who was torn away from you ruthlessly, and that circumstances over which you have no control make it necessary for you to employ others to assist you in rescuing her. That being the case, the sex of the person you employ is nobody's business, and the thing for you to do is to amuse yourself in Paris and wait for results."

Hawkins looked at her helplessly. The conviction of her tone and manner suggested that she had voiced an ultimatum which admitted of no argument; but he could not follow the reasoning.

"Yes, I suppose the pining away part of it is all right, although I still manage to enjoy three square meals a day," he answered doubtfully. "I don't quite manage to catch the other part, though; would you mind saying it again, and not quite so fast?"

Miss Vennar looked at him with a twinkle of mischief in her eyes, and tossed her shapely head in a particularly tantalizing manner.

"Certainly, Mr. Hawkins," she answered. "Perhaps you would understand me better if I put it in simpler language. You are just a great big goose."

III.

Miss Vennar allowed herself but brief respite in Paris, and Hawkins spent every available moment of it in trying to dissuade her from proceeding on her journey. She was deaf to his arguments, however, and adamantine in her refusal to permit him to accompany her.

"Mr. Hawkins, you fail to realize that you have had your chance at this business, and, if I may be allowed to say so, you made a mess of it," she said impatiently just before leaving. "You are now out of it, and I don't see that it would make it easier for me if I had to look out for you, as well as rescue your sweetheart. The only service which you can render me is to give me an exact description of the young woman; for I believe that I already have the other information necessary. Make it as accurate as possible, if you please; omitting the natural exaggeration of the lover."

Hawkins realized that her refusal was definite and made the best of it.

"Just remember that I did my best to keep you out of it, if you get into trouble, though," he concluded doubtfully. "I can't give you a very accurate description of Bibi; for I never saw her face—that is, not all of it."

"What?" exclaimed Miss Vennar incredulously. "You are pining away for a woman whom you have never seen? What kind of love-making did you carry on, and what were you doing all that time before you were interrupted?"

"Well, the situation had its disadvantages," acknowledged Hawkins, blushing. "As you already know, she is the inmate of the harem of Selim Ahmed Pasha. His house is not in Pera, the European quarter, but on the outskirts of Scutari, where they don't like a Christian any too well; even if he isn't trying to butt in on their privacy. Those Turkish women all look alike—that is, to the eyes of every one they meet on the street; for they are so bundled up and veiled that you can't see anything but their eyes. With the modern veil, which they call the tcharchaf, you may perhaps get a suggestion of the outline of the face; but the yashmak leaves only a narrow slit for the eyes, and that's what Bibi wore whenever I saw her."

"And you never peeked under it?" asked Miss Vennar incredulously.

"N-o," admitted Hawkins reluctantly. "I never did."

The lady legioner looked at him pityingly, and shook her head.

"Well," she said quietly, "I have told you that it would not be proper for us to travel together; but after that confession, if I were going to take you

along—which I'm not—I don't believe that I should bother about a chaperon. Even Tom Tinkler—and he's not such a much—would have had more gimp about him than that."

"Da——, I mean, confound Tom Tinkler!" exclaimed Hawkins irritably. "I guess if he'd had to keep one eye peeled for those brutes of eunuchs who are all walking arsenals, climb a twelve-foot wall with broken bottles on the top of it, and try to persuade a girl who couldn't understand English to elope with him, he'd have had his hands full without fussing with her veil."

"I think that he might have been tempted to select a person who was not afraid to show her face; instead of taking a chance in a feminine grab-bag," suggested Miss Vennar sarcastically.

"Now, see here; I never saw that Johnny, who seems to be the main guy at your boarding-house when he isn't walking the floor and misdirecting customers at Catchem & Skinnem's; but if Bibi had ever made goo-goo eyes at him through that slit in the yashmak, you can bet that he'd have been dodging eunuchs, too," said Hawkins.

Miss Vennar gave a little snort of protest; but remembering Mr. Tinkler's susceptibility to the very inferior charms of her auburn-haired rival, she refrained from saying several things which were on the tip of her tongue.

"Will you kindly tell me how much opportunity you had for observing those goo-goo eyes?" she asked, in a severe and businesslike tone.

Hawkins nodded. "Not very much," he acknowledged regretfully. "I got next to her first when our caiques—those are the little boats which every one uses on the Bosporus—passed each other two or three times one Friday afternoon on the weekly promenade to the Sweet Waters of Asia. She had a bang-up turnout; six rowers in red and gold liveries and two of the fattest eunuchs in Constantinople as chaperons. Just the same, I thought there was a little twinkle in her eye the second time we passed, and the third time there could be no doubt about it; for she winked. Well, I hadn't been reading 'The Secret of the Harem' and those other stories that cheerful liars have told about romantic adventures in Constantinople for nothing, so I was wise right away. That night when a water-carrier out of a job came and gave me the tip to follow him I knew that I was due to rescue a poor captive bird from a gilded cage, and I toddled along after him. Say, if you ever have the chance to go through what they call the streets of Scutari after dark, take my tip and don't do it. The scavengers have been on strike there for twenty years, that I can swear to, and the pariah dogs who sleep in the roadways don't like it a little bit when you step on 'em. Before I got to the top of the hill I had qualified for treatment at a Pasteur institute, all right, and it was just as well that the kindly shades of night gave an air of mystery to what remained of my trousers.

"Pretty soon—and none too soon to suit me—we came to a big house at the top of the hill, right on the outskirts of the town. It wasn't what I should call a cheerful place nor a first-class neighborhood, and I didn't wonder that any one wanted to get away from it. There was a twelve-foot wall around the grounds, the top of it liberally besprinkled with broken bottles. Moslem cemeteries surrounded it on three sides, and what they call a road led to the front gate. I was pretty well out of breath when Tewfik—that was the ex-water-carrier—put his back against the wall and motioned me to climb up on his shoulders. I shinned up, all right, and when I poked my head over there was Bibi waiting at the top of a gardener's ladder. It was a pretty dark night; but I could see those eyes shining through the yashmak, and I got busy."

"How busy?" asked Miss Vennar skeptically, and Hawkins grinned.

"Well, I did the best I could, considering I only had one arm free, and that Tewfik was shaking as if he had breakbone-fever under my feet. Bibi couldn't understand English, which made it a little difficult; for the only Turkish I could speak was a few words I had picked up to express my feelings

to the beggars who swarm about you when you walk through the streets. I tried a few of 'em on her, and she pretty nearly fell off her perch, so I fell back on English. It was romantic enough to suit a boarding-school girl; the nightingales were twittering their love-songs in the shrubbery, the night air was heavy with scent of roses and a few other things which had not been removed by the street-cleaning department, and there was sufficient danger to give spice to the adventure.

"I was listening to her liquid syllables—which told me, I suppose, that she had never known the true meaning of love until her eyes met mine—and, giving her in return some hot ones I remembered from reading 'Only a Milkman's Daughter,' when Bibi caught sight of a lantern coming through the garden, slipped down the ladder, and promptly faded away into the darkness. I didn't linger, either; but the next day I made inquiries. I found out that the house belonged to Selim Ahmed Pasha, who was supposed to have accumulated his large fortune in slave-dealing, his specialty being Circassian beauties—not the kind you see in the dime museums. It was reported that most of the harems in Constantinople were recruited from his warehouse, and I kicked myself for not having sense enough to have gone about my courtship in the regulation Moslem way—visiting his office with my check-book and telling him that I wanted to buy her freedom instead of trying to steal over the garden wall.

"Well, I tried that, and then I wished that I hadn't. I had found out that my houri's name was Bibi, and when I mildly suggested to Selim, who was a benevolent-looking old codger with a white beard, that I should like to put up the cash necessary to free her from her hated bondage, there was something doing right away. His remarks were entirely unfit for publication; but I gathered that I was trying to purchase the pride of the harem, who was destined to become the chief odalisque in the sultan's collection. He frothed at the mouth and pulled out enough of his beard to stuff a mattress, while the number of names he called me and all other Christians was enough to make my hair curl. I saw that I wasn't popular around his office, and started for the legation. Two different chaps took pot-shots at me from the roofs and another tried to slip a knife into me in a narrow lane before I reached Pera, and it made me hot under the collar."

"The impediments in the course of true love in Constantinople seem to be of the strenuous variety," remarked Miss Vennar, when he paused for a moment.

Hawkins nodded. "I reckon your steady Mr. Tinkler would have thought so," he continued grimly. "Well, I was so hot under the collar, as I told you, that I made up my mind to get even with Selim. I devoted the afternoon to working up a few appropriate expressions in Turkish, such as I suppose Mr. Tinkler has often murmured into your shell-like ear, and when night came I started for Scutari again with Tewfik. I had a silk ladder under my coat, and ordered the dragoman from the legation to have my caique at the landing-steps nearest Selim's house. I intended to haul Bibi over the fence and make a run for it, getting on board the French ship which was sailing at daybreak for Marseilles. I made the run for it, all right, and I might mention that I hold the record from the top of the hill to the landing-steps, and I left very few footprints in the mud of the streets, for I only touched the high spots.

"Bibi kept the date, all right. She was at the top of the ladder on the other side of the wall, and in the light of the new moon I could see that her eyes were brighter than ever. I murmured *'Iki geuzlah,'* which signified that she was the light of my eyes, and a few other items I had learned that afternoon, and proceeded to fix my silk ladder to the top of the wall. Tewfik's shoulders did not raise me quite high enough, so I stood on his head. A minute later I was still standing on it; but it had been very cleverly swiped off from his body with a simitar in the hands of a black man who was making disagreeable remarks to me in a falsetto voice,

and he and his side partner were getting ready to make things pleasant for me. Bibi was squealing on the other side of the wall; but I couldn't get at her, and those eunuchs meant business.

"I suppose I should have remained right there and let them carve me up to prove my devotion; but I didn't. I just lit out for the bottom of the hill as hard as I knew how. I believe that every pariah dog in Scutari—they are reckoned at ten thousand—was at my heels, and the eunuchs were shooting as fast as they could pull the triggers of their automatic pistols. I was considerably winded by the time I got in my boat; but I had breath enough when I reached the legation to try to convince the minister that he ought to cable for a gunboat. He didn't see it that way; but he gave me several reasons for leaving Turkey on the first ship, and they were good ones. I heard afterward that a whole regiment of Bashi-bazouks had been detailed to run me down if I stepped outside of the legation; but I sailed on that French steamer. That's how I left Turkey, and that's why I don't believe it would be healthy for me to return."

Miss Vennar readily agreed with him, but refused to listen to his efforts to persuade her to relinquish her mission.

"I shall certainly not be troubled in the same way," she said positively. "There can be no impropriety in my visiting the harems, if necessary, and they will not suspect me of trying to inveigle one of the inmates away. If you should accompany me, it would make them suspicious at once; so you can escort me to the station, and then wait here for my return. I don't mind telling you that the sultan is going to be disappointed—or else have a lucky escape—for I shall bring Miss Bibi back with me and act as bridesmaid at your wedding."

"By Jove! if you bring her back, I think you ought to be best man," said Hawkins admiringly. "I don't suppose that there is any way that I can persuade you to keep out of this muss, but I'll be mighty uneasy until you turn up again—if you ever do."

"And I wonder how much of that uneasiness will be due to abstract worry?" thought Miss Vennar, as the Orient express pulled out of the station, leaving him disconsolately on the platform. "He forgot to give me any tender messages to convey to that Bibi girl—perhaps that was because he thought I would never find her, and—perhaps it wasn't."

IV.

During the long journey across Europe in the Orient express, Miss Kitty Vennar had much time to think over the information which she had gleaned from Hawkins; but in absolute ignorance of the local conditions which would confront her she found it difficult to map out a definite plan of action. She knew that Christians were only tolerated in Turkey, and that the surest way to invite trouble was to interfere, even by expressing curiosity, with the harems. The Moslem laws involving the seclusion and veiling of women had been laid down by the great Mahomet, the founder of the religion, and were still rigidly adhered to. Primarily they were devised as a measure of protection to the women themselves; but the advantages to their lords and masters were so obvious that they had been transformed into a measure of repression, and any transgression was visited with severe punishment upon the inmates of those private jails.

Miss Vennar's previous travels had been confined to a radius of fifty miles from New York; but with the ready adaptability of the American girl she accommodated herself to the different conditions, resolutely refused the advances of fellow passengers of the masculine persuasion who eagerly volunteered to help her while away the tedium of the journey, and devoted herself to the perusal of the collection of books concerning Turkey which Hawkins, at her direction, had purchased for her in Paris.

The time was so well spent that when she embarked on the ferry to cross the Bosporus she felt that she knew her

way about; but the sight of Scutari as they approached, rising tier on tier of mysterious buildings interspersed with domes and minarets, dispelled that illusion. In fact, it was a rather confused and altogether lonesome young woman who finally set foot on the shore of Asia; but nothing about her firmly set lips and resolute little chin betrayed the real state of her feelings as she engaged the porters to care for her luggage and set out for the hotel to which Hawkins had recommended her.

"The very best cure for the blues is action," remarked Miss Vennar to herself as a sense of utter helplessness came over her after she had been shown to her room. "This is a case where I must go it absolutely on my own, and I suppose the best thing to do is to look the ground over." Accordingly she climbed the hill, passing through a network of narrow lanes through which Hawkins had made his hasty retreat in the dark, and finding the journey sufficiently hazardous in the broad daylight. He had described his route so accurately that she had no difficulty in tracing it, and she was so absorbed in the strange sights that she failed to notice the looks of surprise which the excursion of an unveiled, unattended woman in the stronghold of Mohammedanism excited.

In the garish light of day she found the palace of Selim Ahmed Pasha even less attractive than the description of Hawkins—who had seen it only under the softening effect of moonlight—had led her to expect. The Moslem graveyards with their white, dome-shaped tombs encroached closely on the high walls on three sides; the only opening a massive gate, outside of which a dozen heavily armed eunuchs lounged under the shade of an awning. Altogether it had more the appearance of a prison than a palace, the few windows visible having heavy iron bars outside of the inevitable close lattice-work of wood which prevented the slightest glimpse of the interior.

"One thing is absolutely certain," Miss Vennar reflected, as she sat down in the shade of a tomb and gloomily watched the entrance after finishing her reconnaisance; "there is not the slightest chance of getting that Bibi girl out unless I can have a talk with her. I don't know how I am to recognize her, even if I meet her accidentally on the street, for it's dead sure she won't make goo-goo eyes at me. If I try to throw a note over the wall, the odds are even that it will fall into the wrong hands, and then I'd be worse off than before. The only way that I can see a chance for it is to throw a fit in front of the gate. They'll have to carry me inside to revive me, and that will give me an opportunity to look around."

Desperate as that chance would have seemed to any one who knew the reputation of Selim Ahmed Pasha, Miss Vennar would have adopted it if her attention had not been attracted by the unmistakable waving of a white handkerchief from one of the harem windows. It had been passed through the lattice on a stick, and was very apparently meant as a signal.

Very cautiously she answered it by giving a little flutter to her own handkerchief as she drew it from her sleeve, and the one at the window remained quiet for a moment, and then waved up and down rythmically, with little pauses at irregular intervals.

"That looks like an amateur attempt at wig-wagging," thought Miss Vennar as she watched intently, trying to read the signal. Whoever was trying to send the message apparently possessed infinite patience; for again and again the same numbers were repeated. Eight waves, a short pause; five waves, pause; twelve waves, pause; sixteen waves, and then a much longer interval; after which the same signal was repeated. She rapidly ticked off the letters of the alphabet on her fingers, remembering the primitive telegraph-code of her schoolgirl days, and straightway the hall bedroom vanished as an unpleasant memory! There could be no question of it; for giving each letter its proper sequence, A 1, B 2, C 3, and so on, the 8, 5, 12, 16 represented the letters H, E, L, P, and the appeal was obvious.

As quickly and quietly as she could

she waved the answer: 8, 15, 23; and almost before the word "How" was finished, her question was answered by the handkerchief at the window moving slowly to one side and pointing steadily toward the garden at the back of the palace.

Miss Vennar made a little answering signal, and, rising, walked slowly through the narrow lane separating the cemetery from the high wall. The handkerchief was immediately withdrawn, and as she neared the garden she heard the murmur of many feminine voices on the other side of the wall.

"That's all very well; but I don't see that I shall be much wiser from eavesdropping on that garden-party," grumbled Miss Vennar as the unintelligible chatter came to her ears. "That Bibi girl apparently has learned one or two English words; but she'll need more than that to talk business if I am to get her out, for I haven't time to learn Turkish."

The voices came much nearer, and little squeals and shrill laughter convinced her that the women were engaged in some friendly contest or game in which they chased each other, and the reason was apparent when a dainty, pearl-embroidered slipper came over the wall and fell almost at her feet. Miss Vennar was alert, and she quickly picked it up, removing a crumpled ball of paper which was stuffed into the toe before tossing it back. This she did as secretly as possible, for latticed windows which might conceal a hundred pair of suspicious eyes overlooked the garden, and it was not until an hour later when she was safely in her room at the hotel with the door securely locked that she ventured to smooth it out and read the contents.

It was written in English, the handwriting that of an educated woman.

If you are merciful and brave, aid me to escape from this horrible den of iniquity and the fate which is before me. I am an English girl entrapped by a brutal slave-dealer, and shall be sold into perpetual bondage and a living death. Nothing can be done officially; the harem is sacred against investigation or intrusion, and appeal to the embassy would be useless. You are quick of wit, for you read my signal; prove that you are brave and merciful by helping me. If you can send a trustworthy person soon after nightfall to the same point in the wall where this will be thrown over, I can manage to communicate with him. Do not come yourself, for not even a Moslem woman is abroad after dark in Scutari, and you would attract too much attention. He must be brave and cautious. The last man who tried to invade the place or hold communication with us was killed, and his head is on a pole in the garden to warn us. I can see that you are beautiful; there must be some man who for the sake of your approval will venture his life to save an unfortunate woman.

"Humph! If there was I don't know that my recent experience would justify me in taking chances with him like that," exclaimed Miss Vennar sarcastically. "If I could get hold of Jenkins, Halliday, or Simpkins, one of them might take it on as a business proposition, but I don't believe that I should take chances with one of my onliest onlies. I suppose that entrapped female knows what she is writing about," she reflected. "I don't know that it is any particular business of mine to rescue her; but it offers a chance to get into communication with that Bibi girl. Pretty nearly anything in the way of a man would do to carry messages, and it's up to me to find one."

Miss Vennar's preparations for her quest were simple but thorough. She had not been long in Paris; but the time had sufficed to make several very fetching additions to her wardrobe, and when she finally emerged from her room and tripped down the stairs she might have answered for a daily hint from the French capital.

"There have been several useless specimens trying to mash me on this trip," she reflected grimly. "Well, the next one will find me dead easy. If he happens to be like the other dudes whom I turned down, he'll be small loss if he should happen to meet a eunuch or two. If I am not very much mistaken, that Willie-boy who is drinking coffee and trying to make believe that he enjoys smoking a narghileh is just about the kind of easy fruit I'm looking for."

Seated at an iron-topped table on the

small terrace in front of the hotel was a dapper young man. His back was toward her; but his silk hat betrayed the foreigner, and his obvious clumsiness in managing the snakelike tube of the hubble-bubble pipe stamped him as a new arrival. With malice prepense Miss Vennar seated herself at an adjoining table, and the little cough which she gave caused him to turn in her direction.

Their exclamations of surprise were simultaneous, for under the silk hat was the familiar face of Mr. Thomas Tinkler.

V.

Miss Vennar had not confided her destination nor the nature of her mission to any one before leaving New York; for the value of reticence was the first lesson which Mr. Cooper's employees had instilled into their minds.

Mr. Tinkler was, therefore, amazed when he recognized in the fashionably attired young woman whom he met on the terrace of a Constantinople hotel the former companion of many excursions to Coney Island and similar resorts, and Miss Vennar was not only surprised, but annoyed as well; for she could account for his presence only by the theory that he had taken the unwarranted liberty of following her. It quickly flashed through her mind that he might be of use to her, now that he was there, and, concealing her annoyance, she greeted him cordially. She almost regretted her condescension after the first greetings were over; for there was a marked change in her whilom admirer which was aggravating, and he treated her with an entirely unaccustomed hauteur and reserve.

"What brings you here, Tom?" she asked curiously; for Catchem & Skinnem did not remunerate their floorwalkers so largely that their holidays were devoted to European travel, and she knew that his salary was usually mortgaged several weeks in advance to the instalment-plan tailors who provided him with his gorgeous raiment. Mr. Tinkler's manner indicated complete indifference and profound boredom as he expressively shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, I say, you know, it's one of those things which will happen and upset a fellar's plans for the summer terribly," he drawled. "Our house got in a tight place, you know—the Eastern buyer was taken sick and couldn't come—so I volunteered to help out—really, couldn't do anything else under the circumstances—and I've come out here to select the Turkish cozy-corner novelties for next winter's business. Awful bore, you know; but, I say, I'm delighted to run across you, bah Jove, I am!"

Miss Vennar, who knew that he would have given his eye-teeth if necessary to obtain his present chance, was too wise to prick the bubble of complacency. She could make a pretty accurate guess as to the real reasons for Catchem & Skinnem's choice of a buyer; for that firm's methods had been freely discussed at the boarding-house table by many of their employees; but for reasons best known to herself she accepted his explanation as if she believed it.

"So good of you to say so, and, really, Mr. Tinkler, the pleasure is mutual, I can assure you," she answered, assuming the more formal form of address as a concession to his new dignity. The ex-floor-walker visibly expanded his chest.

"Yas, it's always pleasant to run across old acquaintances in a slow hole like Constantinople," he admitted patronizingly, as if the streets of London or the boulevards of Paris were more familiar haunts. "I say, is there anything decent on at the opera, do you know? We might take it in for an act or two, and then have a bird and a bottle, you know." Mr. Tinkler's previous invitations had been confined to the "ten-twent'-thirt'" shows, with, perhaps, a "hot dog" or an ice-cream soda to follow.

Miss Vennar shook her head and gave a sigh of regret. "Really, I can't say what offers in the form of theatrical entertainment," she answered. "I arrived only this morning, and I have been very busily engaged—with friends.

In any case, I am already engaged for this evening; I have a harem appointment." Mr. Tinkler immediately pricked up his ears. The word "harem" has a mysterious attraction for most men, and his curiosity had been excited and his imagination stimulated by the ox-eyed houris whom he had seen on the street that afternoon.

"Er—I say—would it be agreeable to have me act as your escort?" he asked, twirling the ends of his budding mustache. "It's really infernally slow here, and I should be glad of the opportunity to be of service to you."

"But, Mr. Tinkler, you know that gentlemen—and especially young, well-dressed, and handsome ones—are not allowed to enter the harems," she protested, with ill-concealed admiration in her eyes. Miss Vennar realized that he had reached that frame of mind where it was necessary to employ a trowel to apply flattery to make it effective; and Mr. Tinkler mentally congratulated himself that he had taken the precaution to preserve the creases in his trousers by placing them carefully between the mattresses each night during the voyage.

Her objection only served to stimulate his curiosity; and, knowing nothing of the real dangers which stood in the way, he insisted that he would be most discreet. Miss Vennar had no intention of employing him under false pretenses, and she would ask him to run no risk which she was not quite willing to share; but the vision of Mr. Tinkler making a rapid flight from enraged eunuchs, with a pack of pariah dogs at his heels, through the dark lanes of Scutari, appealed to her imagination.

"Really, it would be too dangerous—for you," she said, with a significant emphasis, which was aggravating. "Those black guardians of feminine loveliness are really terrible fellows, and they would consider you especially dangerous. I couldn't think of exposing you to it."

Mr. Tinkler made a gesture which might have led one to believe that he and danger had been bedfellows since his childhood.

"When a fellar has taken the full correspondence course in ju-jutsu he could handle a dozen of 'em, you know," he answered confidently, and Miss Vennar smiled at him admiringly.

"But just suppose a couple of them should come at you with those horrible curved swords," she protested; and Mr. Tinkler's mustache was not heavy enough to conceal the contemptuous curl of his lip.

"Simplest thing in the world for a fellar to do them up completely," he answered. "Lesson thirty-seven tells you just how to overcome them. 'Should you happen to be attacked when unarmed by two men of superior strength armed with knives or swords, try first the method of defense explained in lesson six. Should this prove ineffectual, it would be well to use the defense described in number fifteen,'" he quoted. "'If they are still unsubdued, the pupil must assume the third position, balanced lightly on the tips of his toes. When they rush for him, instead of trying to parry their thrusts or blows, he avoids them by diving head first between their legs, thus escaping their attack and taking them entirely by surprise. It will then be a simple matter, by employing the method described in the preceding lesson, to grasp them quickly by the ankles and toss them in the air. If this is skilfully done, their bodies will describe a parabola, and the ruffians will land on the tops of their heads, dislocating their cervical vertebræ, and the pupil can then notify the coroner at his convenience.'"

Miss Vennar nodded approvingly, and Mr. Tinkler crossed his arms over a swollen chest.

"What a pity Mr. Hawkins had not taken that course!" she said regretfully. "All he could do was to run, and the other poor fellow had his head cut off."

Mr. Tinkler gave a little start, and there was a trace of uneasiness in his expression.

"It's every fellar's duty to learn how to protect himself and a lady friend who may be in his company," he asserted.

"Did they really kill any one for flirting with an odalisque?"

"They cut his head off, I believe; but then, you see, he did not understand ju-jutsu," she answered. "However, I really couldn't think of exposing you to danger; so I shall have to go alone. Of course, the ladies are very beautiful; but a sight of them would hardly pay for the risk."

Mr. Tinkler was not a brave man, but he was ignorant, and at heart believed that Miss Vennar was trying to dissuade him from the feminine motive of jealousy. He put up such a bold front that Miss Vennar finally consented to let him accompany her, after exacting from him a solemn promise that in case of trouble he would disregard the milder methods described in lessons six and fifteen, which would result only in breaking the arms or legs of his adversaries, and at once employ the defense taught in number thirty-seven, which would put them permanently out of business.

Mr. Tinkler agreed, and retired to dress for the occasion—which meant opera-hat, pumps, and evening clothes. Thus attired he set out with Miss Vennar.

When they reached the top of the hill, where the palace of Selim Ahmed Pasha was so charmingly situated in its environment of graveyards, they found no suggestion of danger in the peaceful surroundings and appearance of the palace. A faint light shone through the lattices of the closely barred harem windows, and the soft illumination of the moon fell on the garden and the encampment of the dead which surrounded it. A sweet, feminine voice singing a love-song to the accompaniment of a lute floated over the wall, and apparently no one within the vast enclosure, where so much feminine loveliness was immured, had the slightest suspicion that a plot was on foot to rob it of its brightest jewel.

Miss Vennar reconnoitered the lane carefully, while Mr. Tinkler devoted himself to pinning up many rents in his trousers, caused by attacks of pariah dogs; and when she arrived at the spot where the slipper had fallen she ventured to give a slow whistle. Her signal was cautiously answered, and a moment later she heard the scraping of a ladder against the wall. Mr. Tinkler removed his opera-hat with a graceful sweep when a woman's head was poked over; but Miss Vennar allowed him no time to get off the carefully prepared speech which he had composed for the occasion.

"Are you the girl who wrote that note?" she whispered; and the woman gave a smothered exclamation of surprise that she had come in person.

"Yes, it was I," she answered, in a trembling voice. "You can help me, can't you?—there is some one who, for your sake, will run the terrible risk!"

Mr. Tinkler cleared his throat to embrace the opportunity; but again Miss Vennar forestalled him.

"Now, see here, I don't know who you are nor anything about you," she answered sharply. "Of course, I'll be glad to do you a good turn; but you must remember that it deserves another on your part. Do you know a girl named Bibi in that bird-cage?"

"Do I?" answered the unknown scornfully. "Of course I do, and she's the spitefullest, homeliest——"

"Hold on, I haven't time to listen to all your feminine troubles!" interrupted Miss Vennar hastily. "I'm quite willing to help you out of there; but that Bibi girl has got to come, too, and be the first one that gets over the wall at that. Now, if you have anything to suggest which will lead to that double elopement, I am ready to talk business."

The woman on the ladder again attempted to express her opinion of Mr. Hawkins' inamorata; but Miss Vennar quickly and curtly ordered her to stick to the point.

"Well, it will be no easy matter," complained the English girl. "We are continually watched by scores of vigilant and well-trained eunuchs. They know that the slightest carelessness on their part is punished by a particularly unpleasant death, and they are given unlimited authority in maintaining dis-

cipline. All of the outer doors of the harem are carefully locked and guarded; but inside there is not a fastening on a door, and we have no privacy. I can't stand that Bibi hussy, anyway, and——"

"Now, business first, please," interrupted Miss Vennar sternly. "How can we get you two out?"

"I think it can be managed for tomorrow night," answered the English girl doubtfully. "If you can arrange so that we can go direct to a steamer and sail by daylight, we can manage to get out of the garden. We are allowed to walk here every evening; but, since that horrid head has been sticking up on a pole and looking at us, most of the girls are afraid to come out of the house after dark. That happened through some of that Bibi's flirtations, and I can assure you that she is the——"

Miss Vennar was about to interrupt again, when she was spared the necessity; for the girl's remarks terminated in a squeal of terror, her head suddenly disappeared, and on looking up the lane Miss Vennar discovered the cause. Around the corner a couple of negroes, wearing a full equipment of curved daggers, horse-pistols, and simitars, had swung at the double-quick, and, catching sight of them in the moonlight, advanced with shrill cries of anger. One glance convinced her that they were not out for pleasure; and, with a hasty injunction to Mr. Tinkler to make himself particularly scarce, unless he was sure that his ju-jutsu was in working order, she gathered up her skirts and fled in the direction of Scutari.

Mr. Tinkler was taken completely by surprise. He had been so intent on trying to find an opportunity to relieve his mind of the graceful speech which he had prepared in advance, that the carefully acquired lessons had quite slipped his memory; and, in any case, those two heavily armed black men did not bear the slightest resemblance to the bolster which he had so easily vanquished.

Miss Vennar ventured to cast one look over her shoulder as she ran; but, instead of seeing the two eunuchs describing graceful parabolas through the air, as she had expected, she noticed that they were in close pursuit of a gentleman attired in evening dress and a crush hat, who was dodging between the tombs of the Moslem cemetery in an endeavor to reach the open country. His coat-tails were flying out in the breeze, and he appeared to be keeping well ahead of his pursuers; so she lowered her head and attended strictly to her own escape. She had reached the end of the wall in safety, when her flight was interrupted by violent contact with a corpulent Turk who came around the corner. Her head was firmly implanted in the region where his fifth waistcoat button would have been had he worn such a garment, and the impact knocked most of the breath out of him; but they rolled on the ground together; and Miss Vennar's exclamation of impatience at the interruption was quickly smothered by a heavy cloak which was thrown over her head by one of his sable attendants.

A moment later she was raised from the ground, as helpless as a baby in its swaddling-clothes, and, to the accompaniment of much jabbering in high, falsetto voices, carried rapidly away. She heard a heavy door slammed behind her, there was a pause while another was unlocked; and when the cloak was finally removed, she found that she was herself an inmate of the harem which she had left her native land to despoil.

VI.

Had Mr. Tinkler had time to theorize, he would have come to the conclusion that nature is, after all, superior to art; for, while he had never taken lessons, even by mail, in sprinting, he found it more efficacious than his carefully acquired artificial method of self-preservation. For the time being he was too much occupied in trying to keep out of reach of the two panting, squealing negroes, who were close at his heels, even to congratulate himself that the enforced plain living which his small salary had entailed had prevented the acquirement of undue adipose

tissue, which hampered the movements of his pursuers; and it was not until he had lost them—and, incidentally, himself—in the country some three miles back of Stamboul that he ventured to slow down. The rain had commenced to fall in torrents, and he had entirely lost his bearings, and would be unable to understand directions, even if he could find any one to give them to him—a position sufficiently disheartening.

After two or three disastrous attempts to find shelter, in the course of which he ran into patches of bramble bushes and fell into a ditch filled with particularly offensive water, Mr. Tinkler gave up in despair, and concluded that he would have to wait until daylight. It was not a pleasant vigil; and the rising sun revealed a very miserable and bedraggled individual, in whom it would have been difficult to recognize the mold of fashion and glass of form who, some six weeks earlier, had been considered "just too lovely" by the salesladies of Catchem & Skinnem's emporium. That he eventually reached his hotel was due to chance; for his return journey was as aimless as his coming.

He was discovered by a mob of Moslem children on their way to school; and the opportunity to stone a lone and helpless Giaour was not lost upon them. Their missiles were accurately directed, and, after finding that it was useless to try to catch his persecutors, he fled, his line of flight fortunately leading him to the suburbs of the Turkish capital, some two miles from the palace of Selim Ahmed Pasha.

From the top of the hill the wonderful panorama of the Golden Horn, with its three harbors and the Sea of Marmora, like a great sapphire in the morning sunlight, which followed the rain, lay stretched out before him; but Mr. Tinkler was in no mood to appreciate the beauties of nature, and he was interested only in locating the hotel, where he might have spent a peaceful night if Miss Vennar had not tempted him to pursue the intrigue which had resulted so disastrously. He slunk through the narrow lanes as quietly as possible, sticking close to the walls, and giving precedence, unquestionably, to every pariah dog which he met, while the sight of an armed eunuch escorting a woman swaddled in yashmak, tcharchaf, and ferejeh, made his teeth chatter like a pair of castanets.

The gay lothario who had started from the hotel so blithely the night before, returned to it in such a deplorable condition that the kavas, whose duty it is to drive importunate beggars from the gateway, and to give the guests a measure of protection within the walls of the building, raised a threatening whip, and warned him to get out; but the immediate prospect of breakfast and clean clothing was before him, and gave him courage to assume a part of the lordly manner which had characterized him when he walked the broad aisles at Catchem & Skinnem's. The kavas apologized most humbly when he recognized him, and welcomed him heartily, informing him that a gentleman who had arrived early that morning was awaiting him most anxiously.

The gentleman introduced himself as Mr. Q. Archibald Hawkins—greatly to the relief of Mr. Tinkler, who had feared that he might be called upon to interview a representative of his firm in New York—and remarked, by way of recommendation, that they had a mutual friend in the person of Miss Kitty Vennar. An expression of pain came to the weary face of Mr. Tinkler at the mention of her name, and he looked at Hawkins suspiciously.

"I suppose that Miss Vennar has informed you of the difficulties which I encountered in protecting her retreat last evening?" he asked cautiously.

Hawkins shook his head. "No, that's just what I was so anxious to see you about. Miss Vennar has not returned to the hotel; but when I was told that she went out under your escort I felt easy in my mind. Can you tell me where I can find her?"

It was Mr. Tinkler's turn to shake his head, which he did as vigorously as a rapidly stiffening neck permitted.

"I supposed she came back here," he answered. "I was so busily engaged

in preventing a couple of eunuchs who attacked us from getting at her that I lost track of her in the darkness."

The details which Mr. Tinkler proceeded to give of the night's adventures, in reply to the eager questioning of Mr. Hawkins, were in many important particulars at variance with the strict truth; for, according to his account, the negroes had been so completely vanquished by his prowess that they had fled in terror, and in pursuing them he had lost his way; but the essential fact that Miss Vennar had disappeared during the excitement could not be denied, and Hawkins gave an exclamation of disappointment.

"Man alive! why couldn't you have been satisfied with putting the kibosh on them without trying to run 'em to death?" he asked irritably. "I was so worried that I just couldn't stay in Paris, for I knew she would get into trouble; but if I show my face outside the hotel in daylight I'll get plugged sure; for I was the first one to get into trouble by trying to butt into that harem, and there are several assassins laying for me. Do you think those black devils got a good look at you before you—I mean they—ran?"

Mr. Tinkler was quite sure that he had escaped recognition, but he was not at all enthusiastic when Hawkins suggested that in that case it would be perfectly safe for him to make a daylight reconnaisance of the neighborhood of Selim Ahmed Pasha's palace. He advanced many good reasons for abstaining from that excursion, and Hawkins was forced reluctantly to admit that they were sufficient. He had made a pretty shrewd guess as to the real happenings of the previous night; and he was convinced that the girl was a prisoner within the high walls of the harem. There was no legal process which would enable him to search the place, and his own life was not worth a moment's purchase in this stronghold of Islam after defying its most sacred laws; but he also realized that it would be of slight value to him if misfortune came to Miss Vennar through her efforts to further his matrimonial designs.

The guardians of the palace would be doubly alert to prevent unwarranted intrusion or rescue; but Mr. Hawkins has been accustomed by a lifetime of indulgence to deny himself nothing, and he didn't intend to begin that disagreeable process at this late day. Many plans to effect her release occurred to him, only to be rejected as impossible, until in desperation he resolved to make a personal investigation of the exterior of the palace, trusting to a native disguise to shield him from suspicion.

Arrayed in the costume of a howling dervish, a large, false beard obscuring most of his face, and the long burnoose concealing a couple of large caliber revolvers and a fully charged cartridge-belt, he climbed the long hill which he had descended so rapidly in the darkness, strolling sedately as befitted his assumed character, and mumbling devoutly as he clicked the beads of his rosary from hand to hand. Hawkins was very much worried; but it was not without satisfaction that he noted the changed expression on the face of Selim Ahmed Pasha, whom he met in one of the narrow lanes. Care sat heavily on it, and there was a furtive look of fear in his eyes as he glanced uneasily over his shoulder and hastened his steps in the direction of the bazaar, where his office was situated.

The exterior of the palace was unchanged, except that the usual guard of eunuchs at the gateway was more than doubled; but even the high walls and latticed windows could not conceal from the outer world that it was not peaceful within. An angry buzzing, very like that of a disturbed bee-hive, came from the harem; and in the selamlik, the part of the building occupied by the masculine members of the household, an excited discussion in high-pitched voices was going on.

"I'd give a good deal to get a peep over that wall, for there is trouble of some sort going on inside," thought Hawkins; and, secure in his disguise, which had been unchallenged in the streets of Scutari, he ventured to approach the group of eunuchs who were chattering at the gate. He concluded

that there might have been a foundation in fact for Tinkler's story of the fight the previous night; for two or three of them seemed decidedly the worse for wear, and they all looked uneasy as they interrupted their conversation to listen to the unwonted sounds which came from within.

Their conversation was unintelligible to him—a fact which he regretted most bitterly, and which led him to the gravest fears regarding the fate of Miss Vennar, for there was no question about their uneasiness, and he could only account for it by the theory that she had met with violence at their hands. The right of the Turks to preserve the harem inviolate against masculine intrusion is admitted by the powers, and no attempt is ever made to shield a foreigner who transgresses; but the murder of a woman simply because she was found in the neighborhood would be an entirely different matter, and apt to lead to the losing of heads, which is cheaper for the sultan than salving the outraged national honor by a money indemnity.

A careful survey of the walls convinced him that the broken bottles on the top had been recently added to, making surreptitious entrance or exit more hopeless than before; and he could discover no weak point in the defensive isolation of the interior.

It was with a heavy heart that he retraced his footsteps to the hotel, for he realized that no influence which he could command would make it possible to overhaul that mysterious building, while the desperate chance of gaining entrance held out no prospect of aiding Miss Vennar if she were alive, or of adequately avenging her if she had been made away with.

He discarded his disguise and appeared once more on the terrace in his ordinary dress, finding Mr. Tinkler, with a bad cold in his head from the exposure of the previous night, refreshing himself with a cup of coffee and trying to extract smoke from a narghileh tube.

"Codstadidople is a bub blace," he remarked dolefully. "I cad't do ady busidess, for whed I try to talk to ady ode id the bazaar they spit od be, ad call be a dog of a Christiad."

"That comes from trying to get gay with their houris," answered Hawkins sympathetically. "I've had troubles of my own for the same reason."

"I dod't give a dab for all the houris that ever cabe over the pike," replied Tinkler irritably. "All I wadt is to get by orders filled ad get back to Dew York. I cad see all of theb I deed id by busidess at Codey Islad."

"And Miss Vennar?" said Hawkins interrogatively. Perhaps it was just as well that the remark which Mr. Tinkler was about to make concerning that young woman was interrupted by a violent fit of sneezing, for Hawkins was in a mood to vent his pent-up anger on anything which offered fair excuse; and before he had recovered the power of speech the kavas approached with a note, which he handed respectfully to Hawkins.

"From his excellency, Selim Ahmed Pasha," he said, looking at the American curiously; and Hawkins gave a whistle of surprise when he opened it.

DEAR SIR: I have just learned that you have returned to Scutari. If you are still in the market for the class of goods which you were looking for on your last visit, I think that we can do business. We are overstocked at the present moment, and prices are correspondingly low. One or two slightly shop-worn articles are offered at especially tempting prices. If you still desire to do business, I should be pleased to have you call at my offices. Trusting to receive your esteemed orders, I am, my dear sir, with assurances of my profound respect, your obedient servant,

SELIM AHMED PASHA.
(Per K. V.)

P.S.—You were not to butt in, and I should like to know how you expect me to get out of that hall bedroom unless you let me earn the money. Hastily, K. V."

VII.

The general arrangement of all great Moslem houses in Constantinople is the same. Those apartments which are reserved for the masculine members of the household, where the master receives his men friends and transacts such business as may be brought to his

house, are comprised in the selamlik. Back of them, usually facing upon a high-walled garden and connected by a long, narrow passage with the selamlik, is the harem, to which no adult male except the master has access. The size of this secluded and jealously-guarded portion of the building depends largely upon the owner's taste and inclination in the number of wives he cares to support; but many of the inmates are slaves, attendants, and dancing women, kept to minister to the comfort and amusement of the wives, who are not allowed the freedom of their sisters of the West. In the picturesque and flowery language of the Orient, the harem is spoken of as the "Abode of Bliss"; while the opening from the selamlik is poetically called the "Door of Felicity."

In the palace of Selim Ahmed Pasha the harem was unusually large, although the constantly changing inmates were brought there not for the master's pleasure, but for profit.

Many different nationalities had passed through that harem, but never until Miss Vennar so unexpectedly fell into his hands had he secured a specimen of the American beauty. It was a very pretty, very angry, and very vigorous young woman who stood revealed when the cloak was removed from her head after she had been placed on her feet in the inner court of the harem, and the practised eye of Selim Ahmed Pasha, who was sitting cross-legged on a low divan, estimated her value at many purses of gold; which would be clear profit, as she had not cost him a piastre.

When Miss Vennar looked about her, she had no doubt as to the character of the place to which she had been so unceremoniously escorted. From previous observation, she knew that behind the graceful screens of carved woodwork in the windows there were very serviceable iron gratings, although the luxurious furnishings and appointments made the prison a comfortable one. The two coal-black, corpulent eunuchs who stood beside her, panting from their unusual exertions, and anxiously watching their master's eye for a sign of approval, looked like very efficient jailers, and she realized that escape from her present environment would be difficult.

Selim looked her over critically, as if she were a possible piece of merchandise in which he was trying to detect a flaw.

"Bismallah!" he exclaimed finally. "You have my permission to be seated."

"Oh, you speak English, do you?" replied Miss Vennar, with a sigh of relief. "That simplifies things, for there are several matters I wish to talk to you about."

Selim nodded solemnly, but there was a twinkle of amusement in his eyes. "In the Abode of Bliss it is the master who gives permission to speak," he hinted significantly. "What are your accomplishments?"

"I'm not looking for a situation," snapped Miss Vennar in reply; and Selim congratulated himself that he had not given the signal of dismissal to the eunuchs when he looked at her. "You've mussed me up terribly bringing me here, and it was entirely unnecessary. This is the very place I've been trying to get into for the last twenty-four hours, and I'm quite capable of walking."

"In; not out, however," answered Selim significantly. "I trust that you will find it an agreeable residence—temporarily, of course, for there should be a ready sale for a woman of your charm of manner."

"Now, see here, Mr. Selim Pasha, don't waste your time throwing bouquets at me," answered Miss Vennar icily. "I'm out here entirely on business, and I have no time to waste on airy persiflage. First, I wish to know what has become of my gentleman friend who accompanied me this evening?"

"There are many things you must learn, my dear young woman," answered the Turk placidly. "First, that the inmates of a harem have no concern with gentlemen friends, as it is considered bad form and decidedly improper."

"And there is one thing which you

had better understand right now," answered Miss Vennar quickly. "I am not an inmate of your old harem; I have just dropped in on a matter of business."

Selim smiled good-naturedly, and spoke a few words in Turkish to one of the eunuchs, who went out, returning a moment later with a girl, who, in spite of her Oriental costume, was undoubtedly English.

"You will spare this young woman a great deal of unpleasantness if you will explain some of the rules of this establishment as they have been taught to you," he said grimly. "You might explain the necessity for maintaining strict discipline, and the means employed to do it."

The girl was trembling with fright, but when she spoke, Miss Vennar recognized the voice which had appealed to her for help.

"You must give in; really you must," she said, in a shaking voice. "Those horrid eunuchs have full authority to beat you, and——"

But here Miss Kitty Vennar lost her patience. "Now, see here, Mr. Selim Pasha," she cried. "I am curious to see the true inside of life in the harem, and I sha'n't mind being your guest for a few days; but I'll earn my keep. You asked me what my accomplishments were. Well, I can take down three hundred words a minute, and receive dictation directly to the machine. I'm willing to put in regular hours, with the usual Saturday half-holiday; but I tell you right now that if any of these darkies try to get gay, I'll turn this Abode of Bliss into the finest imitation of rough-house you ever saw. Now, with your kind permission, I am ready to be introduced to the ladies of the family."

Selim Ahmed Pasha had dealt with many women in his time, and, although he had learned that even carefully trained Moslem females possessed personal idiosyncrasies, which made each one a little different from any of the others, he had found it necessary to establish one invariable rule—he believed in letting them know from the beginning that there was a hand of iron within the velvet glove, and immediately establishing their relative positions. Miss Vennar looked determined and businesslike as she faced him; but, after all, she was a woman, and not a very large one at that. The meaning of a simple movement of the hand was quickly interpreted by the two eunuchs, but it did not escape the watchful eyes of Miss Vennar. She had not been nourished on the enervating, cloying diet of the harems, nor softened by a life of luxurious idleness; and when their dusky hands were extended to seize her she was not there.

A moment later the eunuchs were firmly convinced that they were in the middle of a cyclone, from which they emerged with bleeding faces and sore shins to seek the shelter of the inner apartments, while Miss Vennar launched herself on the astonished pasha, and, twisting her pretty hands in his voluminous beard, proceeded to bump his head against the wall behind him until he saw more stars than any astrologer had ever discovered in his horoscope.

The English girl watched the proceedings in speechless astonishment until Miss Vennar desisted from lack of breath, and the pasha burrowed his head deeply in the cushions of the divan.

"Just fancy a girl doing that!" she exclaimed, as Miss Vennar turned to her, panting but defiant.

"Why didn't you join in?" asked the American, eying the discomfited pasha. "Come on, I want to see the rest of the bunch; particularly that Bibi girl."

Selim Pasha made inarticulate but vehement protest, and ventured to raise his head from the shelter of the pillows.

"Wait!" he finally managed to stammer out. "I am now ready to talk business."

"I'll talk with you when I have met the ladies," replied Miss Vennar dryly. "There are one or two propositions I may wish to lay before you; but first I want to look over the goods. I'll give

you one tip; unless you have more eunuchs than you know what to do with, don't let any more of them fuss around me. Now, come on you—what's your name?"

"Veronique Coralie Smith," answered the English girl, who seemed half-stunned by the rapidity of the passing events.

Miss Vennar gave a little snort of disapproval. "Sounds like one of Ouida's novels. But never mind; I don't suppose that you could help it." A moment later she had found her way to the general living-room of the harem, Veronique Coralie guiding her and pointing out the different inmates, calling each by name.

"That's Fatima; that fat blonde eating Turkish delight in the corner—she's a Circassian. That black-haired thing smoking the narghileh on the divan is Shahrazade, from Georgia. Those two playing piquet are Menek and Ayesha—I don't know just what breed of mongrels they are—and that antique, who is playing the lute and thinks she is singing, is Bibi, who is——"

"What?—is that the Bibi girl?" interrupted Miss Vennar, disregarding the other. "Do you mean to say that I have come all this way to get *that* out?"

Veronique Coralie nodded. "That is certainly Miss Bibi," she answered, elevating her retroussé nose several degrees higher than nature had already done. "I told you that she was the homeliest, meanest hussy in the lot, and I don't see why you wanted to bother about her."

"Well, I'll tell you, in confidence," answered Miss Vennar. "It was because she had sense enough to keep her veil down; if she had ever raised it, or if Mr. Q. Archibald Hawkins had done it for her, I should not be here. However, I am not responsible for that, and all I have to do is to get her out."

Bibi's personal appearance certainly left much to be desired from an esthetic point of view. Her eyes were undoubtedly large; but her other features were in proportion; and, if ever there was a countenance to which the yashmak would be becoming, she possessed it. There was a grim smile on Miss Vennar's lips as she seated herself beside her on the divan, while Veronique Coralie proceeded to enlighten the other ladies on the events of the evening.

They listened incredulously, until one of Miss Vennar's dusky victims happened to poke his head in the door on business; and the appearance of his face, and his shrill cry of terror as he fled at the sight of his late antagonist, offered convincing proof of the truth. At one time or another it had been his duty to administer chastisement to each and every one of them, and their docility was largely due to a fear of repetition. They were straightway prepared to listen attentively, and to profit by the heretical doctrines which fell from Miss Vennar's lips and were translated by Veronique Coralie into the vernacular; and surely the walls of that Abode of Bliss had never listened to the like.

Miss Vennar found Bibi difficult to talk to, even with the assistance of Veronique Coralie's interpretation. Even ordinary intelligence had apparently been denied to her, and she did not seem particularly pleased at the prospect of being taken to the man who had risked so much for the sake of her eyes. Prolonged questioning revealed only the fact that her tastes were simple; she doted on Turkish delight as a steady diet, and her favorite occupation was to lie on a well-cushioned divan and watch others work or play. Hawkins had appealed to her from the general air of prosperity which surrounded him and because she had always heard that Americans were the least exacting and most indulgent of husbands. Miss Vennar concluded that her heart was not very deeply involved in the affair; but she realized that business was business, and that the possession or lack of charm had nothing to do with the matter.

"There is no accounting for tastes—as Mr. Tinkler's preference for that red-headed cat illustrates—and perhaps this is just the kind Hawkins would like, after all," she reflected. "At any rate,

she is the girl I was sent out here to get, and he shall have her."

Life in the harem is, at best, monotonous, and the inmates of the one into which Miss Vennar had intruded eagerly welcomed the prospect of anything which would liven things up. Miss Veronique Coralie Smith had been enticed from England on the understanding that she was to receive a large salary for teaching English to the ladies whom Selim Ahmed Pasha was educating; but that wily gentleman had kept only so much of the contract as provided that she should be furnished with board and lodging, and had silenced her protests by his usual fatherly methods. The other girls had been accumulated by the ordinary business methods in vogue in Turkey, their own personal preferences being the last thing considered in the matter; and Miss Vennar found that they listened eagerly to the revolutionary doctrines which she proceeded to preach to them.

Selim Ahmed Pasha, sitting cross-legged on his divan, was uneasy in his mind as the unchecked murmur which told of insubordination came to his ears. His wares had always commanded high prices in the matrimonial market because of their thorough submissiveness and docility; a point of considerable importance to prospective purchasers who indulged themselves in the doubtful luxury of several wives who had to live together. He had known experienced husbands reject houris of great beauty but uncertain temper submitted by other dealers and eagerly acquire even slightly damaged articles from his shop on his guaranty that they were "harem broke"; but now he realized that the business reputation he had so carefully built up might be knocked into a cocked hat by this firebrand whom he had so carelessly introduced into the peaceful precincts. He was interrupted in his cogitations by the entrance of Miss Vennar, accompanied by Veronique Coralie and a reluctant Bibi.

Selim regarded them furtively, tenderly stroking his long beard, and ready at a moment's notice to burrow again in the cushions.

"After reflection and due consideration, I have decided to dispense with your services, Miss Vennar," he ventured. "I am ready to provide you with proper escort to your hotel."

"When I am ready to go to my hotel I sha'n't bother you," replied that young woman, seating herself uninvited beside him, and Selim edged cautiously away. "As I told you, I have a proposition or two to make you. In the first place, I want this Bibi girl."

The Turk raised his hands in protest. "My dear young lady, that is impossible; you can understand that I have a business reputation for fair dealing—as well as dealing in the fair—to maintain; and at the present moment one of your countrymen, Mr. Q. A. Hawkins, practically has an option on her."

"What?" exploded Miss Vennar angrily. "Has that dude been butting in again?"

"I can assure you that he was negotiating for her some weeks before you appeared on the scene," answered Selim hastily, preparing to burrow as she half-rose to her feet and turned toward him. "Owing to his ignorance of our method of bargaining, the negotiations were temporarily interrupted."

"Do you mean to say that all of your rage and the attempts to assassinate him were only part of your ordinary business methods?" asked Miss Vennar, remembering Hawkins' graphic description.

"My dear young lady, that on which we set great value acquire worth in the eye of others," Selim said cunningly. "You will understand that I have not spent a lifetime in this business without learning something about human nature. Had I set a price upon Miss Bibi at his first visit, he would have started to beat me down, and would have eventually secured her at something like her face value."

"In which case you would have owed him money if he took her off your hands—but go on!" remarked Miss Vennar.

"Exactly," agreed Selim. "On the other hand, by absolutely refusing to

listen to him I was in a position to receive his offer, and by throwing out a few hints about her great beauty I knew that it would be a large one, and that I might even make him raise it. As you have probably discovered, the young woman is not overendowed with mentality; but I can assure you that she would have had too much common sense to raise her yashmak until after the wedding ceremony had been performed, for she would not have many chances. You can see that I am in a rather delicate position, as I was informed by a telegram from my agent in Paris that Mr. Hawkins was en route for Constantinople."

"He is, is he?" remarked Miss Vennar grimly. "Then I'll give you a straight tip, Mr. Selim Pasha; if you have any other possible purchaser for Miss Bibi in view, you would be wise to close with him, even at a sacrifice."

"If the fascination of her eyes is sufficient to draw him across Europe and to make him brave the dangers of assassination, I believe that he means business," answered Selim confidently; but Miss Vennar had reason to believe that the houri was not the only cause of that venturesome journey. She had not been for several years in the employ of J. Cooper without learning the value of inside information, however, and she modestly refrained from telling all she knew.

"Perhaps you are right," she admitted doubtfully. "I can tell you one thing, though; Mr. Hawkins is rather more sophisticated than when he left Constantinople—he has had the advantage of expert instruction—and I don't believe he will make any 'unsight, unseen' dicker. However, as I am temporarily in your employ, I am quite willing to carry on any further negotiations in the matter, and I'll let you down as easily as possible."

Selim started to protest that he was quite able to carry the transaction to a conclusion; but a glance from Miss Vennar caused the words to lose themselves in his beard, and she continued: "It is also understood that you carry out your agreement with Veronique Coralie. Just as an evidence of good faith, I shall carry on the necessary correspondence with Mr. Hawkins, and when the matter is closed up I will leave you to run the purely native part of your business in your own way."

Selim could hardly believe his ears; but the determined and businesslike manner of Miss Vennar gave ocular confirmation of the fact that it was not a matter of sentiment with her, and he humbly asked her permission to retire to the selamlik where he could think the matter over.

Miss Vennar graciously granted it, and with faltering footsteps he made his way through the long passageway.

VIII.

Mr. Hawkins read the note twice before he could really believe that it was not a joke, and then without comment handed it to Mr. Tinkler. The latter gentleman, whose ears were buzzing from the effects of large doses of ammoniated quinin, accepted it languidly; but its contents brought an expression of interest to his watering eyes, in spite of the sweeping condemnation of all houris which he had so lately expressed. Anything in the way of a social visit at night, implying evening dress, was, of course, out of the question; but the business tone of the letter suggested the idea of an afternoon call, and he had several fetching things in the way of waistcoats which he was not averse to displaying to the admiring eyes of the Abode of Bliss. Mr. Hawkins mentally digested the letter with very mixed feelings. The assurance that Miss Vennar was not only safe, but evidently congenially and profitably employed, was grateful and reassuring; but, on the other hand, he had unaccountably lost interest in the success of the mission which had brought her there. As Mr. Cooper had suggested, his infatuation for Miss Bibi had arisen through idleness, and had been stimulated by the fact that there were obstacles in the way.

Mr. Tinkler's despondency was measurably lightened when he turned to him and handed back the note, and so great is the influence of mind over matter that even his distressing pathological symptoms were visibly relieved. He glanced at Hawkins expectantly as he asked him what he was going to do about it.

"Do? Confound it, I'm not looking for bargains in the matrimonial line!" he answered irritably. "If that old geezer will return Miss Vennar safe and sound he is welcome to keep the rest of his bunch, for all of me."

"It would be interesting to look at the goods," ventured Mr. Tinkler, twirling the ends of his mustache gracefully. "I suppose there would be no obligation to purchase if not suited."

Hawkins shook his head doubtfully. "I don't know whether they have a breach of promise law out here or not. Anyway, I'm going to try and make some sort of a dicker with the old boy to obtain Miss Vennar's release, and if he absolutely insists upon it, I shall even be willing to relinquish all thought of abducting Miss Bibi from under his protecting wing. Here, you—who brought this letter?"

"The bearer waits for a reply," answered the kavas with a salaam, and Hawkins ordered him to be brought in.

"You can tell your master, the Pasha Selim Ahmed," he said to the eunuch who was ushered in, "that I shall be pleased to receive a visit from him and talk over that little business matter. I find that exposure to the air in the streets of Scutari does not agree with me; but I'll wait for him right on this spot."

That Selim Ahmed Pasha considered the matter urgent was proven by the fact that he utterly disregarded the traditions of leisureliness and dignity which characterize the transaction of business in the East, and arrived breathless from running to keep the appointment.

"*Salem alakbar,*" he said, as he settled himself, and Hawkins acknowledged the salutation with a curt nod, and proceeded to business.

"Selim Pasha, from your letter I judge that you have one of my countrywomen, Miss Vennar, as a captive in your harem, and there will be no chance of business between us until she is released," he said sternly.

The Turk raised his hands in protest. "Mr. Hawkins, you entirely misunderstand the situation," he pleaded. "Miss Vennar is not a prisoner; in fact, I am beginning to think that she owns the place, and if you will only persuade her to leave you will earn my eternal gratitude, and I shall be only too pleased to make you the happiest of men by presenting you with the jewel of my collection, the incomparable Bibi, whose charms have been reserved for the eyes of my imperial master, the Sublime Porte, as a small token of my appreciation."

Mr. Hawkins shifted uneasily in his chair, but Mr. Tinkler sat up and took notice.

"Er—I judge that you find Miss Vennar a trifle too strenuous?" suggested Hawkins.

"Truly, she has converted the Abode of Bliss into a veritable antechamber of Eblis," Selim acknowledged. "During the morning I have received no less than six ultimatums, demanding the right to receive gentlemen visitors at least three evenings a week; an unlimited supply of spring hats from Paris; a regular shipment of chewing-gum; the installation of an ice-cream soda-water fountain in the main court; the abolition of the corps of professional chaperons, and the limitation of the use of the hair-brush to strictly hirsutic application."

"In all of those demands I can recognize the fine Italian hand of Miss Vennar," acknowledged Hawkins. "I take it that the profits of your business would be seriously reduced by her continued residence among your bevy of beauties."

"Abolished, my dear sir," admitted Selim, with a shudder. "These new-woman notions are not at all well received by our Turkish husbands. That is why I am willing even to risk the displeasure of the sultan by sacrificing

to you the fair Bibi if you will induce her to depart."

"Selim, I'm sorry for you; but I know Miss Vennar," answered Hawkins, shaking his head. It annoyed him that the slave-dealer so persistently returned to the subject of Miss Bibi whom he more and more wished to eliminate from the proposition as the chance of again seeing Miss Vennar drew nearer. "I know that she will not voluntarily leave the harem until she has reorganized it on Western models; but, of course, there is always a way."

The Turk looked at him hopefully; for he was willing to make any sacrifice to return things within the harem to a peaceful condition.

Hawkins looked at Tinkler, who drew his chair closer and carefully pulled up his trousers to prevent them from bagging at the knees. "As I told you, I know Miss Vennar, and I know that it would be useless to argue with her; but for a consideration my friend and myself would undertake to abduct her."

Again a look of gloom settled on the Turk's face, and he wagged his head hopelessly.

"Six of my trustiest eunuchs tried to put her out this morning, and there are six temporary vacancies on my staff," he answered dolefully. "The Hakim says that if no complications set in they may be able to be out of bed in a month."

"Far be it from me to instruct an expert in femininity; but there are certain curves which you are not onto, Selim," answered Hawkins, smiling. "No woman can resist the attraction of an elopement, and if you'll promise to chain up those black watch-dogs of the treasury who make it unpleasant for prowlers about your garden at night, I'll guarantee to entice her over the wall."

"Could a fellar get a look at the others?" asked Tinkler, who was feeling much better. Selim shook his head at this suggestion.

"It is impious to look at the unveiled face of a Moslem woman until after the marriage ceremony," he answered. "May I ask if you are a bachelor?"

Tinkler nodded quickly, and the face of the Turk lightened at the prospect of a possible customer.

"I have several articles which might interest you, then," he suggested. "Of course, the pearl beyond price, Bibi the incomparable, is already engaged to your friend Mr. Hawkins; but if you will accept my written guaranty we may be able to do business."

"Now, see here, Selim," objected Hawkins. "You are taking entirely too much for granted, and I want you to understand that my interests are entirely in the hands of Mr. J. Cooper, of New York, and his accredited agent, Miss Kitty Vennar. I don't wish to be consulted any further in the matter of Miss Bibi, and I don't believe in interfering. Tinkler, don't you let him work off any of his left-overs on you; don't consider my feelings, old chap, if you want to do business with him, but insist upon having the best. Anyway, I think we'd better drop everything else until we get Miss Vennar out."

So confident was Mr. Hawkins that Selim Ahmed Pasha allowed himself to be convinced that there was a ray of hope in the situation. Between them they carefully elaborated the plan for the evening, with the result that when the moon rose that night Mr. Q. Archibald Hawkins and Mr. Thomas Tinkler were again in the lane from which they had each retreated in haste. By some strange chance, a ladder was carelessly left outside, and Mr. Hawkins mounted it. By another strange chance Miss Vennar happened to be strolling in the garden near that particular spot, and she quickly answered his quiet signal.

"Mr. Hawkins, unless you have more heads than you know what to do with, I should advise you to get off that ladder and go home," she said earnestly when she recognized him. "I have changed the interior arrangements of this establishment so that all of the eunuchs who idled about the harem are now available for patrol duty outside, and I think you stand a good chance of getting sliced up."

"Miss Vennar, I refuse to budge from this spot until you consent to accom-

pany me," he replied positively. "Mr. Tinkler is on guard at the foot of this ladder, and if you would save us both from great danger I would suggest that you hurry."

Miss Vennar was thoughtful for a moment, and even in the moonlight Mr. Hawkins thought that he could distinguish a little twinkle of mischief in her eye when she looked at him.

"Mr. Hawkins, as you may remember, we have discussed the impropriety of traveling together without a chaperon," she answered coyly. "Of course, she would have to be a married woman, and I can now see a way out of the difficulty. If you will run along and get a clergyman, I will guarantee to provide the bride, and we can kill two birds with one stone. Miss Bibi is quite prepared to fall into your arms, and when she is Mrs. Hawkins she can fulfil the duties of the position."

"Damn Miss Bibi!" exclaimed Hawkins ungallantly. "Can't you understand that I am trying to call that off?"

There was a mild protest from the foot of the ladder, and Mr. Tinkler ventured to ask if he might see the young woman.

"If you do, you will accomplish more than I did," answered Hawkins savagely. "I was willing to take a leap in the dark; but I've made other arrangements."

"That deal with Mr. Cooper goes, though," insisted Miss Vennar. "You're not going to do me out of my commission, and I'm going to boost her over that wall or stay here myself."

The position seemed hopeless; but Mr. Tinkler gallantly rose to the occasion. In his mail that afternoon he had received the announcement of the wedding of the auburn-haired girl to the manager of a "Streets of Cairo" show at Coney Island, and he saw a chance to make them both feel badly by appearing with the real thing in the way of Pearls of the Harem. Miss Vennar listened patiently to the proposed amendment, and upon Mr. Hawkins' assurance that he would accept it as an effective delivery of the goods to himself, and would give a receipt in due form, she proceeded to boost that priceless gem up the ladder, and then, closely followed by Miss Veronique Coralie Smith, she climbed it herself.

The wedding at the legation was a quiet affair. Miss Bibi, with the native modesty of a Moslem woman, coyly refused to raise her veil until the marriage certificate had been delivered to her, and while it was being made out Miss Vennar advised the others to leave. Previous to their departure on the following day Mr. Hawkins entered the principal drug-store in Scutari to procure some necessary toilet articles for Miss Smith.

At one counter he noticed Selim Ahmed Pasha, a grim smile on his lips as he selected a large assortment of stout hair-brushes with particularly broad backs, while in the corner Mr. Thomas Tinkler, the incarnation of despondency, was endeavoring to persuade the proprietor to let him have a pint of Prussic acid without a doctor's prescription.

Three weeks later Miss Vennar presented herself in Mr. Cooper's office and handed over Mr. Hawkins' receipt and a check for the amount due. The capitalist promptly drew his check for her commission and handed it over.

"Miss Vennar, your old position is still open," he remarked. "If Mr. Hawkins should require my assistance in the future, I shall be glad to give you the opportunity to make a little something on the side."

"Mr. Cooper, there is not the slightest chance that Mr. Hawkins will require your services," she answered icily as she raised her hand to lower her veil in such a way that a large solitaire could not pass unnoticed. "I might add that I shall see that he does not, and he knows me well enough not to try it."

An Alias From Burke's

By George Bronson-Howard
Author of the "Norroy" stories, Etc.

Only a man of the type of Yorke Norroy, man of fashion and secret agent of the Department of State, could force the hand of John Bull on the Japanese question. In this enlightening story Mr. Bronson-Howard tells how Norroy gets wind of an underhand conference between a special envoy of the Mikado and a British Cabinet Minister. It is a matter of pistols when the spy lays hands on the signed and sealed document that discloses England's position; but a blustering Englishman, though armed, and backed up by a malignant Japanese, has the small end of the game when his opponent is Norroy the tactician.

(*A Complete Novelette*)

CHAPTER I.

A BLOW TO ANGLOMANIA.

ABOUT Piccadilly Circus hangs always a certain noisy quietness. Here it is that no particular brand of noise ever seems louder than another, consequently reducing the entire hurly-burly to a steady hum. Such another paradoxical effect is the steady rolling of breakers upon a beach.

This night the usual scene one expects of the Circus—the Criterion disgorging its horde of diners, the Pavilion swallowing its customary mawsful of music-hallers; the great shops dark and shuttered; the restaurants and theaters, farther or nearer, studded with yellow diamonds of light; the long cab-rank stretching up Regent Street; the omnibuses drawn up by the curbings or lumbering across the square, the horses straining or the motors whirring; and, above all, people, people, people; people in cabs and in 'buses; in motors or on foot; pouring from all of the many streets that empty into the wide plaza.

Out of the mob, select one particular cab bowling across from Regent Street on its way down Piccadilly. Not a cab to warrant any attention; a usual cab of the hansom variety. But of a startling suddenness, this vehicle attracts to itself some cynosure from passers-by, consequent upon its fare's erratic actions.

A very quiet gentleman, this fare, of statesmanlike appearance; smooth-shaven save for a gray mustache; a white dress tie showing above inverness; a top-hat upon his head. His appearance synonymous of breeding, some wealth, much composure; yet, quite without warning, he pushed up the slide of his hansom, and in a tone savoring of the frantic, ordered that the cabman pull up.

And then, before the horse had quite come to a standstill, the once quiet gentleman threw back the shutters and sprang to the pavement. He raced, without either dignity or care, through the crowd surging into the Pavilion, nearly bowling over several highly re-

spectable lease-holders of Brixton; and the cabman stared after him in both amazement and indignant regret.

"'E didn't look loike a gent wot would 'op 'is cabbie," he mused.

A minute or two later the gentleman returned, accompanied by another, who wore a smartly cut box-coat over his dinner clothes.

"Where to, sir?" asked the cabman. "Savoy Theater as at first?"

"Maida Vale," replied the quiet gentleman.

He drew the shutters back again, and stared hard at his companion.

"If there was ever a man played in good luck to-night, I am that man," he said. "To think of finding you, Yorke, the very man I was most wishing I could lay my hands on."

"I've heard, Mr. Secretary," smiled Yorke Norroy, "that there are three places in the world where you must never be surprised if you find any one: Fifth Avenue and Twenty-third Street, the Avenue de l'Opéra—and Piccadilly. So there's nothing very wonderful in that, surely. If you wait long enough in Piccadilly, you will see every one you ever knew. Now, tell me the news."

Close friends these two, and, as they had not seen each other for several years, there were many personal affairs to be talked over. But when they reached the house which the secretary had rented in Maida Vale, Yorke was surprised to see the look of anxiety in his friend's face.

"Yorke," said the secretary, when the cigarettes were lighted, "you have resigned. You are no longer a secret agent of the department of state. But I want you back again. I need you. The country needs you. There's going to be trouble with Japan, and I want you to get to the bottom of a little visit that Baron Hayasi is making here. He has come from Japan on a special mission from the mikado to—technically speaking—the king, although really to the foreign office. He came as plain Mr. Bonzo, and has taken up unpretentious lodgings on Craven Street. You're the only man who can find out exactly why he's here, and I'm going to turn the affair over to you. It's an important job—and a risky one. But for the sake of the United States——"

"I'll take it," said Yorke Norroy.

The secretary nodded his satisfaction.

"Now, let me tell you the story," he said. "The newspapers do not know I am in London. I am supposed to be at my country-place in New Hampshire, too sick to receive callers or to attend to the business of the nation. I crossed in the Reypen yacht *Sylph*. I am not known to be in London. And I am not anxious to be recognized. There would have to be considerable explanation were a cabinet officer of the United States discovered to be here without the knowledge of the British Government. But probably one of the worst crises that the United States will ever face is now confronting me. Can you guess what that might be?"

Norroy's eyes narrowed. "Trouble—with—England?" he asked slowly.

"Exactly," confirmed the secretary. "Trouble with England, after the years I have spent trying to bring about a brotherly feeling between the two countries. Briefly, the United States has to face the prospect of a war with Japan in the near future—within the next five years, maybe. It seems to be inevitable; and Japan is doing all she can to provoke us into it. Now, knowing of Japan's alliance with England, the United States has requested a statement of the English attitude in the event of such a contingency. In plain words, we demanded that England inform us whether or not she would aid Japan should we have trouble with her; and by aid we meant loans of money, building of ships, shipments of arms—and things of that sort. England can lay an interdict upon her manufacturers, shipbuilders, and ship-owners in the matter, if she will. We wish to know *if* she will. This is merely a step from requesting a statement as to whether England will side with Japan or with us. On top of this request, we shall offer to make a secret alliance with England on condition that she manages in some way to break with Japan. In

poker slang, we have 'called her hand,' England has been 'sitting on the fence' too long. We want to know whether she is a friend or a passive enemy. She has got to throw in her lot with us or with Japan. We have made up our minds to that. If not—America can get along without the rest of the world. The rest of the world cannot get along without America."

"And this Baron Hayasi?" hinted Norroy.

"Has been sent by Japan, no doubt, to arrange absolutely for England's support of Japan in case of trouble with us. Such is the suspicion that we have gained from a Chinese spy at the Japanese court——"

"Wung-Chih?" asked Norroy.

The secretary gave him an affirmative. "And so the matter stands. England can dicker with us for the next two years over the affair of this treaty. Meanwhile, she may have made some secret arrangement with Japan. That is what we wish to find out. Now, to come down to personalities. Baron Hayasi has gone to Aix-la-mer, a little watering-place on the Belgian coast, not frequented by Americans or by tourists in general. Lord Crichtwood has joined him there——"

"The chief of the foreign office," mused Norroy.

"Yes—and no doubt fully empowered to act for England in this matter. Now it is necessary that we discover what transpires between Baron Hayasi and Lord Crichtwood—and you are the man to discover it."

Norroy spread out his hands expostulatingly. "It looks like plain eavesdropping—and mighty difficult eavesdropping, at that. But, no—wait a moment!"

"The old Norroy!" murmured the secretary, under his breath. He had seen that same lift of the eyebrows, outstretching of limbs, and the sudden spark gleaming in each eye. And with the sparks glowing, Norroy turned to the secretary, gripping his knee, and began to speak rapidly.

"I've seen places like Aix-la-mer before. Every visitor there is known to every other. If I went as an American, a German, a Russian—anything but either an Englishman or a Japanese, both Crichtwood and Hayasi would view me suspiciously if I tried to scrape an acquaintance. Instead, I'll go as an Englishman—and a titled one. As genuine titles are not to be had for the asking; and as Crichtwood is probably a keen student of Burke's 'Peerage,' I must get a title that won't be questioned. And, fortunately, I'm able to place my hands on the very thing."

"What's that?" queried the secretary. Norroy's ingenious machinations sometimes eluded even his subtle brain.

"I knew a chap in the States—Brockdale by name. I met him in Washington and helped him a bit—in several ways. At all events, I got to know him well enough to have him tell me his family history. He is really Viscount Brockdale, son of the Marquis of Claxburgh, one of the old Scottish peers—penniless but of the bluest blood. He didn't use his title in the States because he was working for some banking firm and didn't think the dignity of the title went well with a bank clerkship. Now he's been in the States for nearly ten years, and is known as plain Mr. Brockdale—so I fancy that obviates him being known on this side at all. Then Aix-la-mer is a very quiet little place, and the chances are that if the papers do chronicle the presence of Viscount Brockdale there nobody will pay any particular attention to it. So for the time necessary—a week or so—I think I'll be the Viscount Brockdale."

"So far good enough, Yorke," said the secretary, spreading out his palms over the blaze. "I was wondering how you were going to obviate suspicion; but I might have known that you would find a way."

"Now, let's see," went on Norroy. "To-morrow I think I'll have the cheek to go down and see the minister of war. He is some sort of a relative of Brockdale's, an uncle, I think—I'll look up the relationship before I go. I remember Brockdale speaking to me about him at a time when the minister was mixed up in some debate over here. It's been ten

or more years since Brockdale saw him; that was before he ran away from Harrow and went to sea, like the little fool he was. The chances are, therefore, ten to one that he doesn't remember Brockdale well enough to swear that I am not he—as both of us are on the same general style. After recalling myself to Lord Willesden, I shall ask for a letter of introduction to Crichtwood. Wait—what excuse shall I give?"

He paced the room for several moments without speaking, then inquired abruptly:

"Has Crichtwood any children?"

"I don't know," answered the secretary. "But there is a 'Burke's' here—that should tell us."

In a moment Norroy found it. "Crichtwood; here it is," he cried. "Two sons, a captain in the Welsh Fusiliers and a midshipman in the navy, and—one daughter: Lady Diana Bundon, born 1885—just the proper age. There's a certain element of luck in this."

He closed the book and replaced it. "I shall tell Lord Willesden that I have seen Lady Diana and have grown quite fond of her; that I should very much like a letter of presentation to her father. Wellesden will give me the letter because he will be glad to see a penniless nobleman marry the daughter of so wealthy a man as Lord Crichtwood. And that, of course, will be the idea he will have in mind when I ask for a presentation. He will very gladly give me the letter to be rid of the chance of having to donate to my living expenses."

"Is the Marquis of Claxburgh so terribly poor as that?" questioned the secretary.

"Poor!" laughed Norroy. "From what Brockdale told me, he doesn't own a single solitary thing except a tumbledown castle in the Highlands that manages to pay its taxes by being rented out to wealthy grocers and pawnbrokers who want to take shooting-parties to the Highlands. The old marquis lives in lodgings about Russell Square somewhere, and the relatives give him living expenses and pay for his dues at one of the clubs. Brockdale told me that he got so tired of living as a dependent upon his relatives, having his pocket-money doled out to him, and being reminded that his schooling was costing Lord Willesden's wife a pretty penny, that he determined to chuck the whole thing, title and all, go to America, and try to make some money so that eventually when he became Marquis of Claxburgh he might be able to live as a marquis, not as a pauper. But Brockdale aside—what do you think of my plan of getting a letter of introduction from Lord Willesden?"

"I think if you can do it some one should erect a monument to your brass nerve and colossal cheek. But aren't you afraid that Willesden will fail to recognize his nephew in you?"

"Not a bit of it. He hasn't seen Brockdale for ten years. Brockdale is slender, so am I; has my color of hair, my complexion; and his eyes seem to lack color, just as mine do. After ten years if you put Brockdale and myself side by side and asked Willesden to pick out Brockdale, he could only do it by guesswork."

The secretary sighed with a certain amount of contentment. "I was sure you would be able to manage this affair, Yorke. It has taken much from my mind."

"But we're still in the woods," went on Norroy. "Now, we can't pile this thing on too thick. You say Reypen's yacht is off Cowes. Get him to loan it to you to take me over to Aix-la-mer. It will make a great impression if my lord's private yacht lands him on the Belgian strand. No one will suspect a viscount who comes in a yacht with a letter of introduction from the minister of war of being a diplomatic spy of the United States. It's well to do these things with a lavish hand. Reypen will loan you the yacht, won't he?"

The secretary nodded. "They won't mind," he said.

"That's good. Well, don't bring them along. I don't want to have to explain to them why I am going as Viscount Brockdale. I can't think of any good lie that will fit the circumstances—to be quite frank with you. The sailors

aboard must think I am just what I state myself to be—Viscount Brockdale."

He arose and gave his hand to the secretary. The cabinet officer gazed at him as he stood under the electric arcs, an immaculate, clean-cut figure in Bond Street clothes, an accurately tied bow of soft gray silk under a closely fitting turnover collar, studs and links of gray stone, a waistcoat of the same color, jewel-buttoned, long-pointed; and a dinner coat of remarkable waist-line effect. A cursory survey of Norroy ever failed to reveal anything but the beau of the clubs.

"I will lunch here with you to-morrow," he said, and, gathering up hat, coat, gloves, and stick, went swiftly out.

CHAPTER II.

AN UNEXPECTED DIFFICULTY.

Norroy had recourse to his make-up box the following morning, and spent some time selecting a small mustache of the sort worn by young men of the Piccadilly clubs. This gummed and adjusted, it was not to be doubted that the lean-faced, clear-eyed man who wore it was any other than a Briton of probable military proclivities and a connection of many and various good families.

He drove to the war office, where he made a very elaborate pretense at taking out his card-case, finding it empty, and calling for a blank card. This furnished him by the ex-sergeant, who acted as porter and who seemed to be the last court of inquiry before leaving the corridors for the anterooms, Norroy wrote "Brockdale" on it, and asked that it be taken to Lord Willesden.

"Brockdale, sir—Mr. Brockdale, sir?" asked the ex-sergeant. He did not seem overcordial, and his tone was a bit suspicious. "You want to see Lord Willesden, sir? Well, 'e's very busy, and that's a fact, sir. Only seen by appointment. 'Ave you an appointment, Mr. Brockdale?"

"Lord Brockdale," corrected Norroy suavely.

"*Lord* Brockdale—ah! I begs yer pardon, yer lordship. Orders is orders, though, and you knows 'ow many people worries 'im. But come this w'y, yer lordship. 'E'll see *you*, I'm sure."

At which Norroy was delivered into the hands of a frock-coated, monocled young man, who was standing with his back to the fireplace in an out-chamber and blowing cigar smoke across the room.

"Lord Brockdale, Mr. Monckton, sir. 'E wants to see his lordship."

The ex-sergeant retreated, and the Honorable Charles P. H. J. Monckton greeted Norroy languidly.

"Lord Brockdale—eh? Haven't had the honor before, I believe. Brockdale—Brockdale. Don't recall seeing you about."

"I've been in America for ten years," replied Norroy.

"Oh, I see. Just come in for the title, eh?"

"No. I've had it since I was born. And I don't know, my dear sir, that I asked to see you. If you have any way of communicating with Lord Willesden, he will doubtless be glad to know that his nephew is out here."

"Nephew—eh? Then—oh, yes, by George! I know you now. You're that old scamp Claxburgh's son—aren't you? Pardon, I forgot."

He opened a door and went out, returning in less than a minute, his round face all a-grin. He took Norroy's arm and led him through another room where some secretaries and stenographers were working busily, then into an anteroom and opened another door.

"Your father's in there," he said. "Old Claxburgh. Joyful reunion, after twenty years."

He pushed Norroy in and closed the door behind them. "Here he is, your lordship," he said nonchalantly.

There were two men in Lord Willesden's private office. There was no difficulty in recognizing Willesden as the one who had wheeled about in his revolving chair—a stern-faced man with iron-gray hair and beard. The other looked a decayed dandy, and was. Attired in lounge clothes of youthful cut,

with a light-blue tie and shirt, a marvelous waistcoat, boots, gloves, and derby hat of brown, and leaning on a stick, his ruddy cheeks and snow-white hair gave the impression of a cherub suddenly aged.

"Douglas!" he said, in a thin voice. "Dear me, my boy, there *you* are, eh? So you've come back, have you, you've come back, you precious rascal? Don't tell me you aren't a precious rascal; I know you are. You've made money, sir. No gentleman can make money honestly; no Brockdale, at least. But I'm glad you didn't come back poor, or I should cut you. If you have money, I embrace you. So does Cocky, don't you, Cocky?"

A slight cast in Lord Willesden's eye was the evident excuse for the marquis' use of this affectionate diminutive. Lord Willesden frowned ponderously and cleared his throat.

"Well, Douglas," he said, "I am glad to see you, sir." He arose and stretched out a hand toward him. Norroy advanced mechanically to take it; but the Marquis of Claxburgh alertly interposed.

"What, what, sir? Shake hands with Cocky before greeting your affectionate old father! You're a cold, unfeeling young blackguard, Douglas; but your father has a heart, a heart, sir, here sir!"

And he tapped himself somewhere in the vicinity of the fourth rib. Norroy, in spite of his chagrin, was more inclined to the belief that there were four or five brandies in the place indicated.

"How d'ye do, pater!" he said, shaking the old man's wrinkled, dry hand; and then turned to perform the same office for Lord Willesden.

Immediately he plunged into the affair which had brought him there.

"I didn't come back for any family reunion," he said, addressing the minister of war. "And if I'd known the pater was here, I should have put the matter off——"

"No heart, that boy!" muttered the aggrieved Scottish peer.

"Off," repeated Norroy. "I've done rather well in America, and I sha'n't have to ask you for any alms. I came here to you to get a letter of introduction to Lord Crichtwood. I have seen his daughter, Lady Diana, and I admire her tremendously. But I'm unknown over here, and I need some guarantee of my rank and position to——"

"Hang it! hang it! hang it!" muttered the Marquis of Claxburgh again. "Couldn't you find enough heiresses in America without coming over to this side? I've my eye on Lady Di myself—fearful quantity of money, the Bundons have—and I'm hanged if I surrender her to any young ingrate such as you who——"

Norroy interrupted his affectionate quasi-father, and continued his conversation with Lord Willesden.

"So if you'll write me the letter, I'll be obliged to you," he added.

Lord Willesden, who had been glancing anxiously at the piles of correspondence before him, sat down, drew some personal paper toward him, and wrote steadily. The Marquis of Claxburgh continued his tirade against ungrateful sons; and the Honorable Charles etc. Monckton over by the door cheered him on with a well-chosen word at intervals.

Willesden arose and handed Norroy the note. "Come to Belgrave Square and see us, Douglas," he said. "Your Aunt Mona often asks for you, and the girls will be quite glad to see you. But—I'm very busy now. Take your father along with you." Turning his gaze to Monckton, he spoke severely: "Charlie! no more visitors this morning."

"But, you see here, Cocky," began the aggrieved Marquis of Claxburgh. "That little loan——"

Lord Willesden, with a weary sigh, unfolded a five-pound bank-note and handed it to the peer. Norroy had already expressed thanks for the letter, and was passing out when his quasi-father took him by the arm.

"Come down to the club, my boy," he recommended, "and have Parker make you one of those American drinks. They are capital, my boy, capital. Your old father invites you——"

"By the bye," broke in Monckton,

"you won't find Crichtwood in London. He's gone off to some beastly little Belgian watering-place, Aix-la-mer, they call it. Lady Di was telling my sister the other day."

"Ah! quite so," said Norroy. "I'll wait till they come back. And now, my dear pater, if you will excuse me, I'll join you at the club later—what is it, the Regents'?—ah, yes! I'll join you there later. Just now I have a most important engagement. You *will* excuse me, won't you?"

He disengaged the marquis' grasp by no means gently, but the old peer saw in his supposed son too handsome a loan to be let go lightly, and immediately regained his grip. Norroy, realizing the futility of resistance, accepted his invitation, and let matters take their course.

They hailed a hansom, and the marquis gave the address of the Regents' Club in Pall Mall. They were driven there while Norroy listened to a recital of the wrongs of the marquis and his many and various hints as to lack of money. And presently came a request for the loan of a hundred pounds.

"You've made money in America," the old man protested, "and your poor old father has to get every penny out of miserly relatives. And I wouldn't have been forced to this if I hadn't ruined myself paying for your education, my boy. You should remember that!"

Norroy had a recollection of Brockdale telling him that his education had been paid for by Lady Willesden. He mentioned this as a belief of his own, much to the indignation of the Marquis of Claxburgh, which Norroy did not give him an opportunity to vent.

"Pater," he said, "that doesn't matter. It's too long ago. But about that hundred pounds. I don't mind lending it—giving it to you; but I've been thinking that I may need you, and I want to be with you for a while. If I give you a hundred pounds, you'll stay in London. Now, I want you to come to Aix-la-mer with me in my yacht——"

"Yacht!" cried the marquis. "Your yacht?"

"My yacht," replied Norroy, with ready mendacity.

"Big?" asked the peer, dilating his eyes.

"I crossed the Atlantic in her," answered Norroy, with what he judged a becoming modesty.

The peer's eyes opened wider. "Crossed the Atlantic! Why, bless my soul! you must have a million. Come with you to Aix-la-mer. Oh, my *boy!*"

He almost wept a joyous consent. Feasts of Lucullus, blooded horses, and money to play baccarat were all represented in his long-lost son.

CHAPTER III.

BY THE AID OF LADY DI.

The expiration of seven days found Norroy lounging in a chair before the fire in his room at the Hôtel De Ritz, Aix-la-mer, and staring pensively into the flames. He was wondering whether he had lost his old knack for solving diplomatic riddles and cutting Gordian knots, whether his ingenuity was exhausted and his resource at an end. For one thing was quite certain: He had discovered nothing of importance concerning any arrangements that Lord Crichtwood might be making with the Baron Hayasi.

It was not because his preconceived arrangements had failed to work out in their entirety; they had transpired precisely as he had anticipated. He and his pseudo-father had left Plymouth for Aix-la-mer on the Reypen yacht, the secretary having made all necessary arrangements. The yacht had landed them at Aix-la-mer before the gaze of the assembled visitors, hotel employees, fishermen, and folk from the countryside. Among them were Lady Diana Bundon and a youth named Dalrymple, both of whom the Marquis of Claxburgh knew, and presented to Norroy. The yacht, having served its purpose, steamed away and left them; and since that time Norroy had been making ineffectual attempts to discover something of what was going on between the

representatives of the English and Japanese races.

But such conversations took place behind the barred doors of the room in the Ritz which Crichtwood used as a study, a chamber flanked on one side by Crichtwood's bedroom and on the other by his daughter's; to neither of which could Norroy gain entrance on any pretext; for they were situated off the main court with windows looking to the sea and doors facing the rotunda of the hotel where gorgeously uniformed servants sat about night and day. This obviated either eavesdropping or burglary.

Norroy racked his brain for a solution of the difficulty. The next day Lord Crichtwood and his daughter were returning to London. It was evident, then, whatever arrangements were to have been made were completed, and that Baron Hayasi would shortly follow the Englishman.

It was not done openly, this affair. Baron Hayasi and Lord Crichtwood were seldom seen together. As to their interests in common which kept them busy six or eight hours out of the twenty-four, it had been given out that Baron Hayasi was completing a book of impressions of the English people, the proofs of which Lord Crichtwood was assisting him to correct.

The Crichtwood party had received Norroy without question. Lord Crichtwood was, as a man, somewhat contemptuous of the Marquis of Claxburgh; but as a Bundon and a brewer's son, he respected the title with that hereditary respect given by none save Englishmen born in a more lowly station. Crichtwood saw that this Viscount Brockdale was obviously a man of decided mentality, well informed, and traveled; and supposed him to be the possessor of a fortune made by his own industry. Added to this the fact that Brockdale would some day bear one of the oldest titles in the United Kingdom, and was related to half the noble families and some royal ones, was a great thing in a Bundon's bourgeois mind. He was disposed to look favorably upon Norroy as a possible son-in-law.

But even had Norroy been the real Viscount Brockdale, there would have been little possibility of arranging a match between him and Lady Diana Bundon. Lady Di, unlike her father, was an aristocrat. Her mother was descended from the Tudors, and had married Lord Crichtwood—then only the Right Honorable Hilaire Bundon—only because a very much-impoverished family could no longer supply her with court dresses and the necessary et ceteras required by a woman of fashion and prominent in court circles. Lady Di had ancestors—if her father had not—a title, and more money than she needed; she, therefore, was actuated in her choice of a husband by no mercenary scruples, and chose the Honorable Edward Cecil Belesmes Dalrymple, the third son of a duke's fourth son, who had no money, no chance of a title, and nothing, in fact, unless may be counted a pleasing personality and a beautiful way of combing his hair and wearing his clothes—which were seldom paid for.

Dalrymple was the private secretary of Lord Crichtwood, as chief of the foreign office; and by the aid of the stipend he received, in connection with this office, occasional gifts from his grandfather and relatives, and abundant credit, he managed to preserve an appearance and be seen about at the proper places during the social season. But as a son-in-law Lord Crichtwood considered him quite impossible. This, however, mattered very little to Lady Di, whose mother had seen to it that there was a hundred thousand pounds settled on her at birth.

Norroy was cognizant of these details, for Dalrymple had been judiciously pumped by the astute agent, as had Lady Di. And it was this affection between the two that Norroy was now contemplating as a possible means to an end.

"It's a cad's trick," he said, poking the fire viciously.

This very day, in talking to Lady Di he had managed to bring around the subject of conversation to Baron Hayasi. Lady Di had no suspicion of

the supposed Viscount Brockdale, and talked freely enough about it; but it was plain to Norroy that her father had confided nothing to her with regard to his true connection with the Japanese.

"Honor bright, I'm afraid to go in my room when those two are talking," she said; and it was from this innocent remark that Norroy got his first useful piece of information—the one he was now trying to turn to some benefit, knowing the way well enough, but hesitating because of the caddishness of the thing.

"Why?" he wanted to know in a slightly amused tone.

"Whenever I go into my bedroom, father knocks and opens the door and looks in at me in the most suspicious way and doesn't say another word to Baron Hayasi until I've gone out again. Honor bright, it's most fearfully uncomfortable, don't you think? And today I went into my bedroom very lightly, and he didn't hear me at first, and then he opened the door and spoke quite roughly to me—he is almost a beast sometimes when he's angry—and asked me how long I'd been there. But Baron Hayasi only laughed and said: 'Come, if Lady Diana will serve as witness to our little agreement, I, for one, will be very glad that she came in.' But father objected at first, and then the baron said I needn't see what they had written, and then they both signed their names, and I signed mine. It was some sort of a horrid, formal document with big red seals on it, and my poor little name looked so solitary and forlorn after the pater's big ink-splotch—such a heavy old ink-splotch—and the baron's queer little paper-lantern way of writing his name—drawing it, I should call it."

"It's probably an agreement for Hayasi to pay your father part of the profits of his book for helping him," explained Norroy.

"Oh, is it? Well, perhaps. But I don't see why they should be so particular that they couldn't let me see it. I wouldn't tell. And then they put it in father's safe."

"Perhaps your father doesn't care to have people know that he is connected with the book. It might criticize the government."

"That's probably it," agreed Lady Di, who was a very flighty little person, and perfectly willing to concur in anything that did not concern her.

"Does your father take his safe with him all the time?" asked Norroy, leading to a more important point.

She nodded. "It isn't a very big safe, but it's too big for any one to carry away."

"I suppose, if you wanted to, you could open it and read the document any way," Norroy suggested.

"Indeed I could. But the pater doesn't know it. I've watched him fix the combination—but, of course, I wouldn't."

"Naturally not," Norroy agreed laughingly; and the subject had been dismissed—so far as the spoken conversation was concerned, and no doubt also in Lady Diana's mind; but it had lingered in Norroy's, and he was now turning it over and over.

Crichtwood and Hayasi had signed some sort of a tentative agreement, one that would not hold good in a court of international law nor in case either country wished to break it, but an agreement, for all that, and one which would give the United States an idea of how she stood in the eyes of Great Britain. Had there been any way to purloin this paper, Norroy would not have hesitated, but the detail which eluded his resource was that it was impossible for him to enter the study either by door or by window without being observed by the servants of the hotel.

There was only one way out of the difficulty: to get the girl to go into the room, open the safe for him, and bring him the document. But she was not likely to do this, that was certain. He had concentrated himself on the subject for some time now, with the idea in view of compelling her to get him the paper. It was evident that a woman would do such a thing for only two reasons: the first because she loved a man, the second because she stood in fear of death. The second might have

been no reason at all; and so Norroy waved it aside. The first, however, looked promising—because she loved a man! She loved Dalrymple—and in that he saw his chance. But it was a cad's trick, and he had a hard struggle with himself before he decided to adopt it.

Harkins, valet to the secretary and temporarily serving Norroy, entered.

"I've laid out your clothes, sir," he said. "Dinner in twenty minutes—and the ball afterward, if you remember. You have promised to open it with Lady Diana, sir—your lordship, I mean."

Norroy nodded impatiently. "Very well, Harkins," he said.

"But you are to be shaved, sir, and dress. You are dining with Lord Crichtwood's party, you and the marquis. So if you'll let me shave you, sir—your lordship, I mean—I hope you will pardon the slip, Mr. Norroy. I'm very careful in public; but sometimes it slips out—I've known you so long, Mr. Norroy."

"It's all right, Harkins. Be careful, though. I told them that you were my man before you knew I had a title. So that doesn't matter. You can shave me now, if you like."

Twenty minutes later Norroy, clean-shaven, his mustache neatly adjusted, and his body encased in the faultless product of a Bond Street tailor, stood gazing at himself in the cheval-glass in his room. He was at his best in evening clothes, clean-featured and close-cropped as he was; and he generally took a certain pleasure in viewing himself so attired. But to-night there was only a certain mild disgust indicated in his eyes.

"You've got to be a cad, Yorke Norroy," he said, shaking his head at the mirrored likeness of his well-groomed person. "A cad—and a rotten cad, at that, my lad!"

"Beg pardon, sir," said Harkins.

Norroy came out of his reverie, and eyed him.

"Harkins!" he said, "we leave here to-night."

He put a little pile of gold on the dressing-table.

"Pay my score, the Marquis of Claxburgh's, and your own. Pack my traps and have them sent by the ten o'clock train to-night, all except a couple of bags for immediate use. Then go over to Peptoff's garage and hire a motor-car to take us from here to Antwerp. I see from the schedule that a boat sails from there at seven in the morning to make the Channel passage. Bring the machine in front of the hotel about twelve o'clock and wait for me. There will be a chauffeur included in the bargain. You understand?"

"Very well, sir. But where are your traps to be sent?"

"To the Bristol, Paris, to be called for. Be careful about having the motor ready for me at twelve; and do not move from the hotel-front until I come."

"Very good, sir. Does the marquis go in the motor?"

Norroy shook his head. "The marquis does not; and he need not know we are leaving, Harkins. Is that understood?"

Harkins bowed, and retreated toward the end of the room to open the door for the Marquis of Claxburgh. Norroy took the latter's arm, and they went down to dinner together.

CHAPTER IV.

A THIEF AMONG THEM.

"My rose-pearls are gone!"

Lady Diana Bundon, a very much agitated young lady, had taken her father by the arm.

"My rose-pearls. Look, father, my rose-pearls are gone. My rose-pearls are——"

It was nearing twelve o'clock, and the ball had been in progress since half-past nine. There was no particular social distinction in the assemblage. They gave such a ball once a month at the Hôtel De Ritz; and all in the possession of thirty francs, which they were willing to expend for a card, were welcomed by Monsieur Louis Beauzet, the expansive proprietor of the hostelry. But there was much money

represented in the ballroom, if there was little position. Fat, dowdy women blazed in jewels and sequined gowns, uneasy-looking men squirmed in dress clothes and fingered diamond studs.

"Have you lost them?" asked Lord Crichtwood, his tone annoyed. "You are so careless, Diana. Those pearls are——"

"Yes, I know how much they were worth," answered the girl, flushing, "and also how much I was attached to them. They were the only jewelry that I cared for, and I don't know what I shall do without them. Please, please, try to find them——"

"There is the proprietor over there," said Crichtwood, catching a glimpse of Beauzet in a corner surrounded by some expostulating women. "I have no doubt that he will be able to locate them for you. Come. We'll speak to him."

There was an intermission at the time, and people were lounging about the ballroom or drinking in the little conservatory court at the rear. Crichtwood made his way to the crowd that had surrounded the portly person of Monsieur Beauzet.

The air was shrill with bits of Belgian French which no less than eight women were hurling at the devoted head of the proprietor of the Ritz.

"Beauzet," interrupted Crichtwood, "my daughter has lost her necklace of rose-pearls. It is very valuable, and is——"

"*Sacré! Nom*——" began Beauzet, then checked himself. "Milor," he said, "there are eight ladees here who have all lose somesing in ze way of ornament—veree valuable ornament. It is not poseeble zat zey all loose zem. There is some one among zis crowd who is one grand rascal—one t'ief—and who take all ze jewleree—and zat man he must be found at ziees moment——"

He dragged a chair from an outlying room, and, mounting it, announced in French that several ladies had been robbed of their jewels.

"As there has been no one in the ballroom but guests," he continued, "it is to be inferred that, as unhappy as I am to be compelled to say it, one of the guests is guilty of the crime—and for this reason I have sent for the gendarmes, who are at every door to prevent the escape of the guilty one. There is only one way by which the thief may be discovered, and the other ladies and gentlemen freed from suspicion. A sergeant of police stands outside. I beg and request each gentleman to submit himself to an examination by the sergeant in order that the guilty man may be discovered. If it is not discovered that any gentleman has possession of the jewels, I must ask the gentlemen to retire that the ladies may be examined by a female detective, who has been sent for."

He bowed very obsequiously and descended from the chair. A sergeant of police, brave in many colors, came hesitatingly into the room, his face plainly evidencing his dislike of the duty he must perform.

"Messieurs——" he began, with a deprecating wave of his hand.

"But this is an outrage," said Norroy, appealing to Monsieur Beauzet, and in a tone calculated to awe that corpulent gentleman. "Do you think that Lord Crichtwood, my father, the Marquis of Claxburgh, Lady Diana Bundon, and the rest of us will tamely submit to being regarded as a parcel of thieves?"

"Brockdale is quite right," chimed in Dalrymple, his cheeks flushing. "We decline to——"

"Hush!" commanded Lord Crichtwood, with a wave of his hand. "The thing is very easily settled. I will be the first one to be examined. Now, sergeant——"

"Will you allow this?" whispered Norroy to Dalrymple.

"Not by any manner of means," shouted the angry young Englishman. "The whole thing is a beastly shame. I——"

"Mr. Dalrymple, I must ask you to be silent," said Lord Crichtwood, whose pockets the sergeant was examining.

Dalrymple subsided, purple with anger. The Marquis of Claxburgh was the next to offer himself for inspection.

"Perhaps you may discover something

that I can't find," he observed jocularly to the sergeant. "I know there must be quite a number of stray sovereigns in my clothes. Find them, that's a good fellow——"

But the search of the marquis revealed only a silk kerchief, a monogramed cigarette-case, and an empty sovereign case with a few bits of silver in his waistcoat pockets.

Norroy shrugged his shoulders. "If my father submits I suppose it is no shame for me to do so," he said lightly to Dalrymple, who still struggled with his anger. Norroy allowed the sergeant to search his pockets, feel his arms and legs, and inside his pumps. With an apology, the sergeant waved his hand, and approached Dalrymple.

"I won't submit to it," cried Dalrymple.

Lord Crichtwood put one hand on his shoulder. "Don't be foolish, Edward," he said. "Sergeant, *allons!*"

Before Dalrymple had time to speak further, the sergeant began the examination of his back pockets. Dalrymple straightened himself and drew away. The sergeant's fingers went into the pockets of his white waistcoat—and came out with a pear-shaped ruby strung on a chain of gold, and small pearls.

"It is mine," cried a corpulent French Jewess, breaking through the crowd toward the sergeant.

Almost immediately a bit of steel snapped about the wrists of Edward Cecil Belesmes Dalrymple.

"Monsieur, you are under arrest," said the sergeant.

Dalrymple raised his handcuffed hands mechanically, dumbly, his look only stupefied. Lady Diana's fingers pinched her father's arms until he took her wrist sharply, then noting the chalk whiteness of her face, forgot his reproof.

In the babel of excitement Norroy retired to the conservatory, ordered a kümmel, and lighted one of his ever-present cigarettes with the gold crest. He had been successful; but the look on Lady Di's face hurt him.

CHAPTER V.

THE INFORMATION GAINED.

The excitement had died to low murmurings before Norroy sought Lady Diana's side. The ball had broken up hurriedly. Those who had not lost by the pilfering had taken themselves to their homes or hotel rooms; those who had accompanied the unfortunate Dalrymple to police headquarters to testify against him and to endeavor to recover their jewels. For only two of the ornaments had been recovered from a search of Dalrymple: the one belonging to the Jewish woman and a brooch of emeralds, the property of a little woman from Brussels.

Dalrymple had denied all knowledge of the affair, professed ignorance of the possession of the two pieces of jewelry, and swore he knew nothing of the remainder. He admitted that the circumstances were against him, but declared that he had been victimized by the real thief, who had placed the jewels in his pocket and escaped when he was taken into custody. This story had gained little belief from those who listened to it, and Dalrymple had been taken off, protesting, to police headquarters, accompanied by Lord Crichtwood, who, while not believing his account, was determined that an official of the foreign office should not be publicly disgraced.

The police, however, were concerned only with the recovery of the other gems, and tentatively promised Dalrymple that he would be released if he were willing to give up the rest of his plunder.

When those bound for police headquarters had embarked in cabs before the entrance of the Ritz, Norroy came to the side of Lady Diana Bundon, who was seated in a huge armchair in the hotel rotunda, head on hand, gazing after the twinkling lights of the cabs as they vanished around the curve of the avenue facing the sea.

"Lady Diana," he whispered. She turned.

"Mr. Dalrymple is not guilty of the theft of those jewels," he said directly.

She straightened in her chair. "Of

course he is not," she flared in indignation. "How can you hint such a thing?"

"I have hinted nothing," said Norroy. "This is not a matter of belief or guesswork. When I say that Dalrymple did not steal those jewels, I mean I know who did, and who placed them in his waistcoat pocket—and also where the rest of the jewels are at the present time."

He had spoken in a low, even tone. She sat quite erect, staring at him.

"You know the name of the thief—you know where the rest of the jewels are?" she demanded, with a quick intake of breath.

He nodded.

"Then why didn't you tell them before——" She broke off, a dry sob in her throat. "And you let them take him to the jail knowing that!"

"I did not know then. I had only suspicions. I saw the man in question fumbling about Dalrymple's waistcoat when he was talking to him. I thought nothing of it at the time, but when the same man watched that pocket of Dalrymple's so intently while the police were searching him, I began to wonder what was up. As soon as the police found the jewels, I looked across at him. He was relieved, and it showed very plainly in his face. That gave me very good grounds for suspicion, don't you think?"

"Yes, yes!" she breathed. "But who was he and where are the jewels? Tell me quickly!"

"I saw this man leave the ballroom while they were questioning Dalrymple. I followed him. He went into your father's room and locked the door behind him. Your father was still in the ballroom."

"Went into my father's room!"

Norroy nodded. "With the door locked," he proceeded, "I could do absolutely nothing inside the hotel. But I had a suspicion that he had gone in there to hide his plunder—that being the most unlikely place that one might look for it. I remembered, then, that your windows opened on the porch, and immediately went outside. The blinds were down, but there was a single little rift at bottom where the lace is, through which I could get a glimpse of the room. I saw just what I expected when I looked. The man had his hands full of jewels, among them your rose-pearl necklace, a string of sapphires, a ruby ring, and two diamond rings. He was kneeling before your father's safe and untwirling the combination when I first looked in. At the second peep I saw him drop the jewels into a little bag and the bag into the safe, shut it, adjust the combination, get up, dust his trousers' knees, and turn off the electric light——"

Lady Diana Bundon was gazing at Norroy as she might have done at one made abruptly demented.

"In my father's room! Knows the combination of my father's safe! But, Lord Brockdale, I—I don't doubt you—but—but—aren't you—a little bit excited over the events of the night? How could any one have entered my father's study without being noticed by the attendants in the rotunda? Look at them," and she waved her hand toward five gorgeously uniformed hotel servants all in full sight of the door of Lord Crichtwood's study.

"Every one of those men has strict orders to allow no one to enter that study except myself, my father, and Baron Hayasi. Even the servants are not allowed to enter unless some one is in at the time—and—they would have prevented any one from entering."

"He entered with a key, and in full sight of every one of the servants. They made no attempt to prevent him."

"But I told you——"

"I know. But this man was one of the three persons you mentioned. It was not your father—that leaves only one other man."

She got slowly to her feet. "You mean that Baron Hayasi was the thief!"

He bowed his head. "It may seem incredible, but Hayasi has a grudge against Dalrymple. He wishes to see him removed. This, I suppose, is his way of accomplishing it. You may believe me or not, Lady Diana, but if I

were you I would go into your father's study and wait until he returns. Then ask him to open the safe for you—and see for yourself."

"I know the combination," she whispered, forgetting that she had told Norroy this before. "I can open the safe. I can hardly believe what you say—but if it is true, I can't wait until my father returns. I will take the jewels to police headquarters myself and free Ned. And then"—she sank into a chair again—"but, no! how can it be true? It is so incredible, so dastardly—I can't believe it of the baron. He has been our friend. We have trusted him. Father has helped him—and he knows that I care for Ned Dalrymple."

"That, perhaps, is the reason for his action."

The suggestion, a flattery to most women to believe a man actuated in a crime by love for them, was taken as an insult by Lady Diana Bundon.

"How could he dare?" she choked. She put one hand on his arm, and caught it tightly. "We'll see whether you are dreaming or not, Lord Brockdale," she said, her color high, her eyes bright with anger. She crossed to the key-rack and took down the key to the study, Norroy following her.

Whether she intended him to enter the room, he did not know; but he *did* know that she would not be able to find the jewels unless he were there. She opened the door; he followed her in and shut and locked it behind her. She was too intent upon her task to notice his actions.

The electric lights turned on, she went down on her knees before the small safe that stood in one corner, chained and stapled to the floor. Three deft whirls of the knob toward certain numbers and the door opened. Norroy saw there were no papers in sight, only two locked drawers, several half-bound books which looked to be ledgers, and others smaller and in morocco which might be note-books, in compartments. Certainly no papers!

"He opened one of the drawers," said Norroy readily.

She turned a hopeless look on him. "I haven't the keys to the drawers," she said.

"We can soon remedy that," was Norroy's cheerful response. He pulled out his key-chain. Strung on it along with keys, corkscrew, pocket-knife, and nail-file was a long, thin piece of highly tested steel which Norroy had found useful before when locks were to be opened to which he had no keys. It might have been a buttonhook, from its appearance, and so Norroy told Lady Diana it was.

Before Lady Diana could interpose he had inserted the steel into the lock. With what looked like astonishing ease, Norroy opened the drawer. Lady Diana's fingers went into it immediately. There was a heavy bag which, unfastened, proved to contain gold to the extent of three or four hundred English sovereigns. Beside the bag lay several bundles of white Bank of England notes, of different denominations, a cash-book, and a number of stock certificates, gold bonds, several check-books, and a pay-roll; but nothing, as Norroy could see from one swift glance, that remotely resembled the documents of which he was in search.

Satisfied of this, and while Lady Diana's slender fingers sent the contents of the drawer topsy-turvy, he inserted his steel pick into the other drawer and opened it. He did not pause to observe any more of its contents than a piece of heavy parchment on the top, the reverse of two seals showing through it. In that moment his right hand caught his left arm and seemed to massage it from the shoulder downward. A bit later he was palming a chamois-skin bag; and as Lady Diana looked up he threw the entire contents of the drawer to the floor, and held up the chamois-skin bag for her inspection.

"Look!" he commanded.

He tossed the bag to her. She tore it open and poured its contents into her lap; the electric light reflected rays from a score of gems, among them her rose-pearls. In an ecstasy of relief, she clasped the jewels to her; and in that moment the document with the seals had been opened by Norroy, glanced at,

and had disappeared up the sleeve of his coat from where the chamois-skin bag had come. The other papers he had not time to investigate, but tossed them back into the drawer and closed it.

"You see!" he said to Lady Diana.

She nodded, seeming stupefied, and let the jewels fall from her fingers to her lap. Norroy stood upright, waiting. Now that he had the paper, he wished to be free of the room. But before he had conveyed this desire to her, the door-knob rattled. Glancing toward the white-paneled door, he saw the knob turn several times, as though the person holding it had become irritated, even alarmed.

"Diana!" Lord Crichtwood was speaking from outside. Followed a staccato rapping.

Lady Diana arose, the jewels scattering as they fell from her lap. She stooped to recover them, and Norroy stepped to the windows opening on the porch, throwing them open.

"Diana!"

Lord Crichtwood's tone was louder.

"Lady Diana!" Hayasi this time.

As the girl slipped the jewels back into the chamois-skin bag and looked in a dazed way at the open safe, Norroy excused himself in rapid whisperings.

"Your father would be angry if he found me here," he said; and, as if considering this sufficient apology, he stepped through the French windows, pushing them shut behind him.

He had gained the paper; he had now only to enter the waiting motor-car and be off. He glanced at his watch. It was past one o'clock.

Crossing the porch, he found a few fiacres before the hotel, their lights fitful and wavering; and one large touring-car sending a white light before it. He stepped from the porch, bareheaded as he was, and went down to the curb. Harkins was indeed in the car; but it was a very despairing Harkins, and not the unimpressionable valet-de-chambre that Norroy knew.

"Something's gone wrong with 'er hinsides, sir," he said, his aspirates failing him in the stress of his emotion.

Norroy questioned the chauffeur sharply in French, and elicited the information that there was necessity for a new sparking-plug, and that he had telephoned to the garage. The machine would be in shape within less than a quarter of an hour.

"A quarter of an hour!" rang despairingly through Norroy's head. It might as well be a quarter of a day. It meant everything: loss of the paper, loss of liberty!

But Norroy never permitted himself despair. He straightened, and spoke to the chauffeur.

"When the machine is fit, give four toots of the horn. I shall know. And be quick. An extra hundred francs for every minute you take off the fifteen. I am serious! This is a very grave matter!"

There was but one thing to do: get that paper off to the secretary without a moment's delay. He remembered that there were envelopes and sealing-wax in a little room off one of the minor corridors of the hotel; also a slit in the floor through which one might drop letters designed for the post into a box provided by the postal authorities.

He entered the hotel by a side entrance and made his way to the room.

Switching on the electric light, his eye ran over the paper hurriedly. It was addressed to the Marquis Jato, chief of the Japanese foreign office, and was written on official parchment of the British foreign office. The handwriting was that of Lord Crichtwood. It was signed with his name, and appended were the signatures of Hayasi and Lady Di as witnesses.

SIR: In reply to your letter of the 19th ultimo and to the additional information gleaned by me on this subject from the representations of Baron Hayasi, I have to state that in the event of the contingency to which you refer, this country cannot be trusted as to attitude. The treaty to which you refer was not framed with an anticipation of this contingency; and this might be well argued as an excuse for the nonfulfilment of its terms.

But in the strictly personal opinion of the writer, it seems to remain only a question of the greatest good to this country. For the friendship of the country in question brings

with it commercial privileges and betterment which Japan cannot replace by any effort. Moreover, the blood-tie is a question of sentiment, and sentiment dies hard among the English-speaking races.

However, I think I am warranted in saying that should Japan find it advisable to give options to his majesty's government in the matter of the Korean, Manchurian, and Japanese railways to be built; should she further judge that a guard composed half of English soldiers and half of Japanese the fittest way to govern the Korean and Manchurian railways; should she find that English soldiers sharing the barracks with Japanese a better garrison for Port Arthur than a garrison wholly Japanese, and furthermore engage to protect English property in China in case of uprising, the neutrality of England would be assured; in fact, it occurs to the writer that loans on the Japanese customs, railways, and public franchises—already heavily held in bond to this country—might be forthcoming; and other matters pertaining to proper assistance be in quite as favorable——

Here the document turned to the inner pages, and Norroy deemed it inexpedient to read more.

The scanning of the document had been a matter of less than a moment. Now Norroy took one of the large envelopes from the rack, folded the document into a small space, and thrust it into the envelope, which he sealed and stamped. Then taking up a pen, he addressed the letter to a certain Mr. Reynolds who lived at a certain number at Maida Vale, which was the particular way in which the secretary had told Norroy to address any letters he might have for him.

Norroy lighted a bit of wax which he found on the pen-rack, and let a great splotch of it fall across the back of the envelope; he stamped it with a plain seal he wore on his watch-fob, then arose and started across the room toward the mail-chute. He had not taken three steps, however, before the swing-door bounded back, and the Baron Hayasi entered the writing-room, followed closely by Lady Diana Bundon. Norroy crumpled the letter into the palm of his hand. He did not know what he had to expect; but he was afraid that, for once, he had come to the end of his rope. With the letter unposted and himself held in durance what hope of giving the secretary knowledge of the true state of affairs?

Hayasi, a large man for a Japanese, was drawn into military stiffness as he faced Norroy. His yellow, pockmarked face was quite without the shadow of any feeling whatever. His eyes met Norroy's.

"You have accuse' me of the stealing of the jewels, and the putting of them into my friend's pocket. You have accuse' me of hiding them in another friend's safe. You lie, Lord Brockdale!"

Norroy shrugged his shoulders. Hayasi stood between him and the mail-chute. He was calculating on how much force and how much suddenness would be necessary to dislodge the Japanese from his position, raise the mail-chute lid, and drop in the letter.

"Lady Diana is the best judge of whether I lie or not. She found the jewels in the safe. And now, baron, permit me to pass."

The door again flew open. Lord Crichtwood stood, also, in the writing-room. He breathed a sigh of relief as he saw Norroy, then caught the Japanese's shoulder.

"That man has stolen the duplicate of the paper which I signed for you today," he said, his tones very low; then looking up, met Norroy's gaze.

"I have telephoned for a gendarme patrol," he told the secret agent, and, as the Marquis of Claxburgh entered unnoticed, Crichtwood stepped closer to Norroy.

"Give me that paper you stole," he said.

CHAPTER VI.

BETWEEN NORROY AND THE MAIL-CHUTE.

It was the Marquis of Claxburgh, whose presence was as yet unnoticed by the others, who broke the silence that ensued by turning a very wrathful face to Lord Crichtwood.

"What d'ye mean, Crichtwood?" he demanded. "What d'ye mean by saying my son stole a paper—eh? That's no way for one gentleman to speak to

another. Gentlemen don't steal—not the sort I know. What d'ye mean by it, sir?"

"Mean!" cried Crichtwood, "I mean what I say, and I am glad that you, his father, are here to listen to what I say. Your son is a thief, sir, a thief, and nothing less. More than that, he is a liar and a traitor to his country. You said that he spent ten years in America. I can well believe that. He may be a loyal American. He is certainly a traitor to England."

Lady Diana crossed the room and put her hands on her father's shoulders. "You have no right to speak of Lord Brockdale as you do," she said. "You are carrying your defense of this Japanese too far when it comes to accusing your own countrymen and brother peers."

Crichtwood disengaged her hands from his shoulders. "Hold your tongue, Diana," he said sternly. "He is my countryman—I'm sorry he was not born somewhere else; and if he is the sort of timber out of which my brother peers are made, I should prefer to be a commoner. I do not pretend to understand how he accomplished his feat, but it is quite evident that the stealing of the jewels was only a blind to get at the contents of my safe. He knew that you had an affection for Mr. Dalrymple—and he played on that. Either he stole the jewels himself, or an accomplice did—I do not pretend to understand that. Some of the stolen goods were placed in Dalrymple's pocket. That arrested Dalrymple. Knowing that Baron Hayasi was the only other person who had access to my safe, it was easy enough to blame him with the theft. You knew the combination and opened the safe—took him in the room with you. The locks of the drawers have been picked. He is evidently an expert at such work, for it was neatly, and it must have been quickly, done. Then he palmed the chamois-skin bag in a way to make you believe you found it in the safe. While you were opening the bag, he stole a very valuable paper—a paper of so much value that he does not leave my sight until he has surrendered it to me."

Norroy's fingers closed more tightly over the envelope. He was glad that part of him was in shadow. As he looked at Lord Crichtwood, he saw shining in the peer's hand the barrel of a small Remington revolver pointed directly at him.

"May I ask what you intend to do with the revolver, Lord Crichtwood?" Norroy asked.

"I intend to shoot you if you try to escape before the gendarmes come."

Claxburgh snorted. "Do you mean to say that you would dare shoot at my son?" he demanded. "Lord Crichtwood, I shall see——"

"Hold your tongue, sir!" said Crichtwood angrily. "The laws of any country permit a man to defend his property with a weapon."

The silence that followed was broken by the noisy toot of a motor-horn, thrice repeated; and Norroy knew that the motor was waiting to carry him to Antwerp.

The Marquis of Claxburgh followed the tooting of the horn by striding up to Norroy and gripping his arm.

"You're no Brockdale if you allow this fellow to insult you as you have done without a word of defense. If it had been I, he would have been knocked down long before this. You stand there and say nothing! That may suit you, but it does not suit me. As my son, I demand that you deny this, and properly punish your accuser."

Lady Diana Bundon came a little nearer.

"Surely, Lord Brockdale, you have something to say!"

Norroy looked from her to his supposed father. He had been debating with himself.

Once the letter was launched in the mail-chute, it would be impossible for Lord Crichtwood to recover it, for the perfectly obvious reason that among all the letters that lay at the bottom of it awaiting collection it would be lost to view. The hand in which he had addressed it was his natural hand; the one he had used as the viscount had been disguised, and as near to Brockdale's as

he could remember it. Moreover, the superscription was that of a very inoffensive person in Maida Vale. Crichtwood imagined it, perhaps, going to America.

Even though Crichtwood managed to get a permit from the postal authorities to examine the mail matter—which was unlikely, to say the least—he would hardly pick out this letter as the one containing his precious paper.

But the mail-chute was directly across the room, and between it and Norroy stood the marquis, Baron Hayasi, Lady Diana, and Lord Crichtwood—with a revolver. It was plain that dissimulation was necessary to achieve his end. Once across the room, he was near three things—the mail-chute, the electric-light switch, and the door.

His attitude changed. Always a clever actor, he was able to appear very contrite, and, to all appearances, somewhat intimidated by the weapon in Lord Crichtwood's hand.

"Lord Crichtwood," he said, "you're right."

He turned to Lady Diana Bundon.

"I'm sorry for what I've done—very, very sorry."

And then to the Marquis of Claxburgh:

"I am guilty of what Lord Crichtwood charges me with. Yes, guilty of——"

The marquis' fist was clenched and upraised, his eyes snapped.

"You——" he began.

Norroy nodded. "Yes, I'm guilty enough. But you have no reason to be ashamed. I have fooled you as much as I have the rest of them. I am not your son. My name is not Douglas Brockdale, nor am I a viscount. I imposed on you as much as on any one."

"Not——" The fingers of the marquis unclenched; his hand dropped to his side; his mouth went open. "Not Douglas——"

Baron Hayasi and Lady Diana viewed Norroy with varying degrees of perplexed amazement. There was a certain amount of incredulity in Crichtwood's demeanor; he suspected a trick to clear the Brockdale name.

Norroy proceeded to explain, mendaciously but in convincing fashion. "It's quite true—everything was planned to get that paper. But it was not planned by me. The man who served as my valet used me as his tool. I am a public-school man—Harrow—later of Balliol, but for all that I was broke two weeks ago—at my wit's ends for money to pay for my lodgings and food. I read an advertisement in the *Daily Mail*—the only paper they took at my lodgings—for a varsity man who was also a good sleight-of-hand performer. That was the one small thing in which I was proficient — parlor-magic — as you can see!"

His hand started toward the Marquis of Claxburgh, but the revolver of Crichtwood neared his head.

"None of your sleight-of-hand exhibitions. We'll take your word as to your proficiency. Go on!"

"Well," continued Norroy, in a very meek tone, "I applied. I was offered two hundred pounds if I managed to succeed. This man who served as my valet knew of the Brockdale connection; knew that the marquis and his relatives had not seen Viscount Brockdale for ten years, and that I possessed his salient characteristics. He sent me down to the war office to get a letter of introduction to you, Lord Crichtwood, from Lord Willesden. There I met the Marquis of Claxburgh; and as he seemed willing enough to recognize his long-lost son in the wealthy young gentleman I appeared to be, it struck me that it would strengthen my cause to bring him with me to Aix-la-mer——"

"You scoundrel!" broke in the exasperated marquis.

Norroy bowed. "And a certain yacht was put at our service—which I pretended was mine. I had been coached in the Brockdale history and the family tree; and I seemed to have much money. That was sufficient for the marquis——"

The peer blurted out an oath, and made a frantic effort to reach across the table to strike the man he had considered with fatherly affection.

"At all events—you know the rest. The affair was planned out for me. I

abstracted the jewels and placed two of them in Dalrymple's pocket. The rest I shoved into the bosom of my shirt, where the sergeant did not think to look. They were wrapped up in my handkerchief then. Later I changed them to the chamois bag and carried that up my sleeve while I lied to Lady Diana about Baron Hayasi. Just as you imagined, Lord Crichtwood, I palmed them and made her believe she had found them; and purloined the paper while she opened the bag. I don't know anything about the paper. I put it into an envelope and was about to send it to Paris. And now—do you assure me that I shall go perfectly free if I deliver it to you, Lord Crichtwood?"

Crichtwood gave him a sneering smile. "You—well, I can't tell you what I think of you! My daughter is present, and what I think is hardly fit language for her ears. But as for going free, yes! I promise, and I'll keep the promise. Give me the paper!"

"But what of me?" growled the Marquis of Claxburgh ominously. "Do you think I shall let this scoundrel go when he has——"

Norroy smiled. "You would cut a sorry figure with that story made public," he reminded him.

Claxburgh subsided into angry mutterings.

"Give me the paper," said Lord Crichtwood.

Norroy felt in the pocket of his dress coat, and his hand came out with a long, sealed envelope. It was the receipted hotel bill which Harkins had handed him before leaving. As Crichtwood tore open the envelope with trembling hands, Norroy saw that his attention was diverted from him. A second later found the revolver torn from Crichtwood's grasp, and Norroy across the room, facing them and backing toward the mail-chute. One hand held the revolver, which was pointed toward the chief of the foreign office; the other dropped the letter to Maida Vale into the chute. And Crichtwood, looking up with a very white face, tore the hotel-bill into shreds.

"That," he choked to Hayasi, "is not the paper."

Hayasi had sprung forward; but was arrested by the depression of the weapon's muzzle toward him, as Norroy, suavely smiling, backed toward the swinging doors.

"He dropped a letter—there!" said the Japanese.

Norroy nodded.

"The paper in question—about which you were so anxious, Lord Crichtwood—is now on its way—to America."

Crichtwood ran directly for him. But as Norroy spoke, the fingers of his free hand had been clutching the electric switch. Now the room was in darkness, and out of it Norroy went headlong through the doors. A heavy door outside he swung backward just as Crichtwood was about to follow him. Its catch snapped, the lock turned, and the key abstracted, Norroy threw the key into a cuspidor, and sauntered carelessly down the quiet corridor to the rotunda. The cloak-room was close by, and from it he obtained his hat and inverness, throwing down a five-sous piece for the attendant. Slipping into the coat, putting on the hat, and, gripping the stick, he walked out of the hotel as calmly as though it were his custom every night to stroll along the beach at one o'clock in the morning.

No sooner had he left—and, in truth, maybe a trifle earlier—than the electric bell jarred from the writing-room. A boy answering it found the heavy door locked. He failed to find the key, and was forced to consult the desk-clerk for a duplicate, while the pounding and knocking from the inside continued to increase in volume.

And, meanwhile, under the eyes of a sergeant and three gendarmes, whom he hailed quite in friendly fashion with his stick, Yorke Norroy climbed into the waiting motor, Harkins gave the word to the hired chauffeur, and the big car shook, trembled, and then abruptly shot down the asphalted boulevard, its search-light pointed toward Antwerp.

The Devil's Pulpit

By H. B. Marriott Watson

Author of "Hurricane Island," "Twisted Eglantine," "Captain Fortune," "Galloping Dick," Etc.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

Captain Mark Wade and Ned Herapath, chief engineer (who tells the story), are offered berths on the English tramp steamer *Duncannon* by a smooth-talking American, Vincent Halliday, and his friend Davenant. The probable destination of the tramp is Baltimore, but there is some mystery about the cruise—a mystery that appeals to Captain Wade, who is something of a free-lance. Arrangements are concluded, and Wade and Herapath board the tramp and put to sea, accompanied by Halliday and several of his friends. On the way out from Southampton they run down a yawl and rescue Jean Carvaulx and his niece, Miss Sylvester, who, at their urgent request, are allowed to remain on board. When well at sea Halliday takes Herapath and Wade into his confidence and tells them that the *Duncannon* is on a treasure cruise, with an island in the West Indies for her destination. Following his discovery of a chart indicating the location of the treasure, he had organized a company and with his partners had chartered the *Duncannon* to search for the treasure. This chart, he declares, has been stolen from his cabin. McLeod, the ship's surgeon, is accused of theft, and despite his denial, is put in irons. At Miss Sylvester's plea he is released, and soon afterward land is sighted. When, off the island of treasure, mutiny breaks out, Byrne, Clifford, Crashaw, and fifteen of the crew make off in a provisioned boat. Halliday declares that they have the chart and are bent on securing the treasure. Captain Wade decides to follow the mutineers. On the way Herapath is conscious of a rustle of skirts in the stern of the boat, but he makes no comment.

CHAPTER X.

NIGHT ON THE ISLAND.

THE boat settled into silence soon, save for the regular dip of the oars and Wade's voice at intervals raised in instruction. The shadows worked about that deeper shadow which I suspected, but I said nothing, for it would have been useless now. If the girl had been so mad as to come ashore, it was her own fault. And yet I could not be hard on her, ignorant of the issues as she was, and so full of life and vigor. She had stowed herself away like a mischievous boy, and now lay quiet as a mouse.

The wind was cool and brisk, and sang in the ears as the sailors sent the boat merrily along into the teeth of it. I felt chill, and even as I felt so, I put out my arm backward, with a protective design which was almost instinctive, to see if she were cold. My hand touched a body warm with the racing blood, and then fingers stole into mine and pressed them—I think she meant to plead with me for herself, to implore my allegiance. It was the act of a child who has been a little frightened by her own boldness. Yet I will confess that I thrilled unexpectedly to the pressure of those delicate fingers. I thrilled, and I let my hand rest there. She may have taken this as a sign that she was forgiven, and that I would stand by her. At any rate, her hand remained in mine, passive now, as if she were content.

The stars emerged again from the wrack shortly afterward, and I could see her where she lay, crouched against

This story began in the July issue. The back numbers can be obtained from any newsdealer. Price fifteen cents each.

the boat, and enveloped in some dark cloak which she had obtained. In the distance now the lights of the island could be seen. Wade stood up, peering ahead for the foreshore, and made a signal presently. The boat turned her nose and marched on a new tack, and for some little time the heights did not emerge more distinctly. Consequently it was clear that we must be keeping a parallel course, or, in other words, be skirting the shore. A bluff of land rose dimly out of the darkness, and slowly dropped into it again; and Wade now issued another order. With the helm up, the boat began to move slowly inward; ten minutes afterward she grounded peacefully on a pebble beach.

We were, so far as we could make out, in a small cove, with bluff cliffs to either side. Indeed, subsequently we discovered that the little bay was almost landlocked, and formed a comfortable and secure, if diminutive, harbor. With the aid of a lantern Wade and Marley examined the chart at once, and came to the conclusion that we had landed on the east side of the island at one of the tiny inlets indicated by the broken coast-line. It was not, of course, possible for us to determine at which point the first boat had made the shore, but we could only hope that it was farther from our common objective than we were. As for that, it was plainly marked on Halliday's map, a rude cross in red ink under the words "Devil's Pulpit," from which a stream appeared to arise. Marley reckoned that it would lie due west of us, and accordingly we prepared to direct our course that way.

But when we came to unload the boat the inevitable discovery was made.

"The lady's there, sir," gasped one of the seamen.

"What's that?" said Wade sharply, and went forward. He had two moods, and I thought I knew which possessed him then. I took his arm as he passed.

"I think the poor girl's sick of being cooped up, Mark," I said.

"Lady's man, eh?" he said shortly. "You've mistaken your occupation—should have been a curate, Ned."

"It's no affair of mine," I said sharply. "Do what you will. But we've no time to send her back."

He boarded the boat again, and I heard him call out: "Now, this is very foolish, Miss Sylvester." But I guessed from his tone that he had changed his mind. It was a reckless expedition, and one madman (or madwoman) the more did not matter.

It had been arranged that we were to beach and conceal the boat—which we did under overhanging bushes—make a cache of some of the provisions, and march with the balance. We required speed, as Wade impressed on us, and at that he turned to the girl.

"I'm afraid you won't like it," he said tenderly.

"I can walk as well as any one," she declared, having now fully recovered her assurance. "And, oh, it will be romantic!"

I wondered if it would be more than romantic, but Wade laughed, and gave the order to start; and so we set out, a little band with high hopes and some misgivings on our venture. We were eleven in all, including Miss Sylvester, and the mutineers were eighteen. But we were relying upon craft rather than strength or numbers.

It was reckoned to be five miles to the place where the treasure was hidden, and, if we were fortunate, we should reach it in two hours; if we had no luck—well, it might be dawn if we ever reached it. Great things were thus depending on this hazard, as some of us felt while we climbed up from the cove.

The sea came in softly here upon a beach of white and broken shells, into which a small stream gurgled down a little coomb. Up this we proceeded; and when it ceased in its source, a bubbling spring in the face of a hillside, we began to creep up that hill, which was sparsely clothed with bushes and trees. There was, of course, no pathway, and we were obliged to make our own direction, which was easy enough at first. But on reaching the upper slopes of the hill we were confronted by a heavy wood, luxuriant and embarrassing with undergrowth. Through

this we needs must cut and hack and break our way very painfully.

I was in the van with a huge ax, which we had brought for some such emergency; and the sailor, Carter, followed close on my heels, clearing up the road I hewed. Wade came next, and after him Miss Sylvester and McLeod, who had managed to keep close to her.

Necessarily our progress was very slow, and we rested at intervals. Sometimes one of the sailors or Wade himself relieved me, and on one of these occasions I had Miss Sylvester for company. She was excited and full of questions, which she discharged alternately at McLeod and myself. Once we came to a pause in a little clearing in a descent which appeared to lead downward to the sea, while Wade inspected the map and the compass.

"This is a ticklish place," said he; "we're on a ridge, and have got to keep it. If we go down anywhere, we'll find ourselves in one of the coves as like as not."

Davenant took the chart and the compass and examined them eagerly. It was then that McLeod pushed by me rather bruskly. He had practically spoken to no one save myself after his disgrace, and since Wade had returned him the blow they had ignored each other.

"See here, Captain Wade," he said, with some vehemence, "I'm not going to let this go on. You owe me an apology."

Wade regarded him coldly. "Why?" he asked.

"You called me a thief," McLeod burst forth.

"That you are here is, I think, good evidence that we don't think you that," said Wade easily. "You were ironed for something else. I thought we'd settled all that."

McLeod looked round, and he wore now a sheepish look.

"I'm bound to say I did take that key," he said. "Clifford put me up to it. But it was lying on the table. I just borrowed it."

"I see," I cried. "That was astute of the real thief. It averted suspicion, and threw it on you. The bureau was broken into, the documents stolen, and the key thrown on the table to tempt you. That was cute."

"A smart trick," said Davenant.

"There's a long score to settle with Messrs. Byrne and Clifford," said Wade. "Let's get along. Doctor McLeod, I think we'll cry quits all round, but I'm not going to sea with you again."

"Darned if I want you to!" growled the irritable Scot.

That journey was beset with difficulties on which we had not reckoned. Not only was the forest almost impervious, so that we were obliged to cut each step for ourselves, but it was broken underfoot, descended into gullies, and mounted heights. The scrub of the undergrowth was sharp, and tore our clothes and lacerated our flesh. Moreover, on our other troubles was superimposed the darkness. The stars were invisible in the tangle of the wood, which was impenetrable to the eye. Night enveloped us, black, occult night, through which we stumbled on our way to an unknown goal at the guidance of a piece of paper, for which there was no warranty. It was sheer madness, but we were committed to the enterprise, and I think that we all by this time had been inflamed to the fever-heat of war.

That night must have tried Miss Sylvester sorely, but she showed desperate pluck, and never murmured or complained. One or other of us was continually offering her assistance, which she accepted very charmingly and simply, as a child is helped over a stile or across a brook. She breathed deeply in the night, and I heard her respirations when we halted once for further consultation.

"Shall we be there soon?" she asked me.

"I hope so," I returned.

"And where is there?" she pursued, with a little laugh.

"No one knows," I said. "But it is quite certain that wherever it is, Miss Sylvester should not in wisdom be there."

"Don't be angry," she coaxed. "I

simply could not have borne to stay aboard."

"There is your uncle," I said.

"Uncle—uncle's—I don't know. He's been very odd lately. He's been so restless. Do you know—I suppose I oughtn't to say it—but we've never got on very well together! I've never understood him. I know he's very clever, a great financier, and all that. But—you see, I was very fond of my aunt, who married him. And uncle has all my money invested, and—I shall be so glad to get to New York again and see all the old places. Do you think I'll find it changed much?" she asked wistfully, but rattled on, when I had answered, in a vivacious mood. Though she was dog-tired, her spirit was buoyant. "Oh, it's just lovely to think I'm in a real adventure like this, with mutineers and all. I've often read of it, but I never thought I should live it like this. I should love to live romance. I've never had any—only luxuries, Mr. Herapath. I don't want luxuries; I want—romance."

To my mind she was likely to get as much adventure here as was good for her; but I could not answer for the romance. I "pitied her simplicity," in the quaint phraseology of the old hymn. It was touching. But presently the saddle on which we were moving began to narrow, so that we were forced, uncomfortably, to keep our position on a sharpening ridge; and next the forest fell abruptly away on the south, and disclosed a sheer height of precipice in front of us. It was impossible to maintain our course as we had been doing, and there remained the alternatives of descent southward into the wooded lower ground, or a passage across the precipice. In view of the fact that darkness would make the latter course dangerous we decided to go down, the more readily that we had no certainty of reaching our destination by one way rather than the other.

The descent was less arduous than our previous course, for the trees grew less intimately together. The plexus was not nearly so intricate; and as the way was downward we pushed on with better heart. Nevertheless, we were fairly exhausted when he had got once more to the level ground, and found the afforestation still sparse.

Here a halt was called to rest, for what with the packs we were carrying and the struggle through the jungle all had come to the end of their resources. Wade was now expressing annoyance that we had been obliged to come down so far. "It would have been better for us to have landed south, and made up by this creek they mark," he said.

"Beggars can't be choosers," I said philosophically. "It is all in the night's work."

I threw off my pack, and lay with my face to the blind heaven, in which the stars were faint. The breeze was off the land, and rustled the leaves around us on its way to the sea, which beat at no great distance on the beaches. Then, moved by a sudden impulse, I arose and began to walk away. I passed a dim figure, and heard my name.

"Mr. Herapath!"

Poor child! she was lying prone, with her face to the stars, but she stirred a little as she called.

"Where are you going?" she asked.

"I'm like that evil spirit that went to and fro," I told her, in the hopes of brightening her. "I am restless, if aweary, and adventures are to the adventurous. Suppose I should hit upon a short cut for us all?"

She got to her feet at once. "Do let me come," she urged. "I'm not really tired. I should love to. Oh, what do you think we'll find?"

"I think you are a dear silly," I said, treating her as a child. "But if you've really strength in your legs, come along. I'm only going to see if the stream which is marked on the map is over here. We can't be far off."

She walked by my side alertly, as if to bear out her words; and together we proceeded two hundred paces westward. The trees being few and far between, this was no long business. But we failed to come upon the stream; and so I northered a little, making a nor'-nor'-west course. After three hundred yards

more the wood thickened, and I would have turned back at that moment if my ears had not been arrested by a sound. It was a voice, distant, but unmistakably a voice. I put my hand quickly upon my companion's to keep her silent, and listened. Now I got the direction, and, still enjoining silence on her, I turned, and we made softly through the wood. Five minutes afterward we all but walked into the stream.

It was some twenty feet across, as I guessed, and ran swiftly in its short course betwixt the hills of that island and the sea. The voice I had heard undoubtedly had drifted to us from the other side, and I was determined to cross and investigate.

"Do you mind being left?" I asked, in a low voice. "I must find out what they're doing. You will be safe here."

She hesitated, and then: "No; don't bother about me," she whispered back.

I pressed her hand in thanks, and plunged into the water. It was amazingly rapid, and it almost took me off my feet. However, I blundered through the boulders on the bed to the other side, and entered that fastness of wood. Immediately afterward I saw a light, and I lay low.

Some one came up through the trees, swinging a lantern, and then a voice called from the distance in unmistakable tones:

"Great Cæsar's ghost! Draw it mild, Crashaw! We ain't a blooming motor-car."

Here was news. At Clifford's words, the man with the lantern paused, swung round on his heel, and seemed about to say something. Instead, however, he started to pick his way again through the wood. It was Crashaw. He was coming in a direct line for me, where I skulked behind a bush, his lantern a gleaming jewel in the night; a Cyclopean eye that blinked and menaced. I could hear voices back in the distance. It was a case of follow-my-leader; and evidently the mutineers had had, like ourselves, a hard fight upward.

The idea reached me almost as the man did. I stepped out, struck him heavily on the temple, and he fell in a clumsy heap, the lantern clashing to the ground. This I picked up at once, and hastily relit, for it was as a will-o'-the-wisp I wanted it, and there was no time to lose if I was to carry out the deception successfully. And next there was Crashaw's body. I had hit hard, and he was not likely to regain his senses for some time; and when he did he would find some difficulty in making out the situation. At all events, I had to risk it now. I took hold of him, and, as I did so, heard a whispering voice, tremulous with fear and emotion:

"Is—is he dead?"

It was Miss Sylvester who had followed me. There was no time to remonstrate with her. I had business of more importance on hand.

"No," I said abruptly, and I carried the inert body among the bushes in which I had hidden.

"Crashaw!" yelled out Clifford, and he was now at closer quarters. "Where in Halifax are you?"

For answer I waved the lantern above my head.

"Oh, how could you do it?" asked Miss Sylvester tragically.

"Child, you mustn't meddle in this," I said hastily. "He's only stunned. I told you you were not fit for this. It's man's work. Please go back before they come, and tell the others to make haste up the stream."

"No," she said. "I'm not afraid. If he's not dead—you mustn't be left alone."

I could have laughed in other circumstances at the thought that her company could be of assistance to me. But as it was I was touched.

"Come, then," I said. "Walk ahead of me, and keep within ear-shot. This is madness, but we're all mad."

She obeyed me without a word, and I directed her in a low voice. We swung round in a curve away from the stream. From behind, the following voices reached us at intervals.

For half an hour I kept this course until we were on much lower ground, and, as I guessed, somewhere to the western side of the island, but still among woods. My companion, for all

her weariness, walked with unflagging spirit, and, though she sometimes cast a glance back at me, she had never once questioned my directions or commented on them. We were in the position of leaders of a file which straggled away a hundred yards or more, and by this time it was apparent that some of them had grown impatient.

"Is this your three miles?" demanded Clifford wrathfully out of the darkness. "Whoa, there, Crashaw! Give pause! Help! I ain't a blooming mowing-machine, and I can't get through this undergrowth."

I paid no heed to this, but presently another voice hailed me.

"We'll be having a rest now, Crashaw. Wait a bit." It was Byrne, but I dared not wait. I swung the light about as if to indicate I had heard, and then I put it out.

Now I could see the girl's figure more plainly in front of me, and I called to her in a whisper. She came back.

"We've done all we can now. We'd better turn in our tracks," I said. "I'm afraid you're tired."

"Yes," she assented, "but I'm glad. How far away are we?"

I told her, adding that we might be obliged to cover a greater distance owing to my rough reckoning and the darkness. We stepped noiselessly away, and made a détour upward to avoid the resting mutineers. Having skirted them safely, we started eastward at a steady pace. My second wind had come to me, and I drew breath freely and without discomfort as I strode, but I feared for the girl. The way had been rough, and she was very silent. Twice she stumbled at my side; and a third time was falling with her foot in a hole, when I caught her. She had lost control of her steps. I put an arm about her.

"Brave girl!" I said. "Your soul goes marching on."

"I'm glad you think that," she said, with a flash of spirit. "It does—it does." She paused. "But, oh, I'm so tired."

I did not say "I told you so"; but I acted. I pressed the arm closer about her, and she leaned against me like a weary child. With a swing I had her on my back, at which she gave a little, astonished cry, and was then silent. She rested there, supported by my hip, without a struggle, no doubt enjoying the relief of her muscles. She did not weigh heavily; and, in any case, I felt I could have supported a heavier burden just then, and have carried it farther. Once she murmured in my ear: "How strong you are!" And another time in a tired voice: "How kind you are!"

My march continued steadily over the broken ground and through the lessening forest. With any luck, I reflected, our party would have reached the Devil's Pulpit—whatever that might be—half an hour ago. And now with the advancing dawn a breach was slowly opening in the darkness. We saw more clearly through the trees, and the shape of the hills was discernible in the more open spaces. In the grayness of the early morning we came out of a thicket upon the little river, which bubbled merrily on its way to the sea; and Miss Sylvester wriggled on my shoulder. I interpreted her sign, and set her down.

"Thank you ever so much," she said, smiling at me. "I feel myself now."

"Let me take you across first," I said.

"How do you suppose I crossed before?" she asked.

"Oh, you—you walked through, didn't you?"

She laughed. "Yes," she said demurely. "But, Mr. Herapath, you must remember my limited wardrobe. I can't afford to take risks. So I crossed in the proper way; and I'm going to do so again."

She had sat down and begun to take off her boots, and I sat down also, and waited.

"I could carry you," I reminded her.

"Oh, but it will be just delicious in the water—so refreshing," she declared.

I had my doubts of the torrent. It had been fairly shallow where I crossed, but it had broken against me with considerable force. But I had come to recognize her wilfulness. She put her boots and stockings about her neck and pinned up her skirts.

"I'm going to enjoy this," she said, as she waded in and squealed "Oh!" as the cold water struck home. "Delicious!" she exclaimed.

I went in after her. It was only some twenty feet to the farther side, but there were rough boulders in the bed. She walked in a careful, gingerly fashion, a pretty, shadowy figure in the twilight. Then she trod on a stone, and lurched forward, and of a sudden the roaring stream was waist-high, and she fell with a startled cry. The torrent had dashed her a dozen feet away ere I could seize her, and then I held her up, dripping. "Oh!" she gasped. "What a fool I am! You'll be sick of such a fool."

We got out, and I squeezed the water from her skirt, while she looked on lugubriously.

"My only garment!" she said pathetically.

"Now I'm afraid you must walk," I said, "or you'll catch cold."

"My teeth are beginning to chatter," she confessed, and mournfully put on her soaking boots. I don't think she remembered at that moment that I carried her stockings. She was a pitiful little figure; but she strode manfully in my wake as we passed upward. Ten minutes later I was brought up by what seemed to be a dense growth of scrub. I followed along it toward the stream, but it descended to the verge, and I was not in the mood to plunge through the chill water again. So I moved in the other direction, but the scrub continued, offering an impenetrable and continuous front.

"Are we nearly there?" Miss Sylvester's voice assailed me. Then there was another voice:

"Who goes there? Halt, or I fire."

I recognized it; it was Marley's. I called back: "It's Herapath."

A face emerged over the thicket of scrub, but was not recognizable in the light.

"You, old man?" said Marley. "What the blessed potato have you been up to?"

"I'll tell you presently," said I. "What's this?"

"This is our blooming zareba," he said triumphantly. "Come along in."

"What is it?" demanded Miss Sylvester, forgetting her misfortune in her interest.

"It's a fortification. They've made a wall of scrub and brushwood," I said, taking it all in suddenly.

"A fortification!" she cried. "But why?"

"Because, my dear child," I said, "this is war, and the campaign is opening."

CHAPTER XI.

MARK'S WAY.

Marley held a lantern, which he swung in Miss Sylvester's face as I assisted her over the barrier.

"Well, I'm staggered!" he remarked. "Anything happened to you? Get lost?"

I told him succinctly the story of our wanderings, and he whistled. "By Jove, old man, we owe you one! That's why we come to be here, then?"

"I'd like to know exactly where here is," I said.

"Blamed if we know ourselves!" he replied. "All we do know is that we followed the river up till we were stopped by a precipice, and we guess that that's the Devil's Pulpit."

"You got some food?" I asked. "Miss Sylvester is worn out and exhausted."

"She's a brick," he said admiringly. "Oh, there's lots of grub. Wade's getting a sleep. We ran this zareba up pretty smart, eh?"

I complimented him, and he led the way to a shelter which had been erected in the umbrage of a great tree, as I could make out.

"They're not bad quarters," he observed. "Plenty of room, anyway, and lots of water down there. Depends on what turns up. This is meant for Miss Sylvester. Wade had it fixed himself. I say, old man, he's in a mighty wax with you."

"Never mind," said I. "It was worth it."

The reply, perhaps, was ambiguous.

Marley stood regarding the girl abstractedly, and without self-consciousness, as was his wont; and if she had not been dog-tired she might have felt embarrassed. In the light of his own lantern he looked yellow and lank of face. His eyes were preternaturally wide.

"Well, I must be getting some food for you," he said, and walked away. "It's my watch," he called back. He was disjointed in his remarks, and somewhat strange. I introduced Miss Sylvester into her improvised hut, and she sank on the couch of fern which the thoughtfulness of some one had raised for her.

"Oh, this is heavenly!" she sighed. "It's better than any ballrooms or theaters, or anything of that sort. It's divine just to feel tired, Mr. Herapath, and have all this fine air and the stars and the growing light."

"My dear lady," said I, "what about your wet clothes?"

"Oh, you have no romance!" she said, with a laugh, and sat up. "It certainly is serious. I've no change. Oh, but here's my cloak, which some one has kindly brought along. Mr. Herapath," she added, with playful demureness. "Do you think that if we stay here, like Robinson Crusoe, we shall be able to make our own clothes out of skins and bark and things?"

"We'll do our best," I said lightly, as Marley returned, bringing biscuits and tins.

"Now set to," he said. "You ought to be peckish."

We ate while he talked; and Miss Sylvester, who had recovered her gaiety, laughed at intervals. "It is so exciting," she cried, but presently yawned a little behind a dainty hand. Sleep would, I knew, make swift descent upon that volatile spirit. Marley and I bade her good night.

The camp was wrapped in silence, but in the gray light the figures of Marley's two sentries could be seen, one on the side of the stream, and the other facing the wood.

"We're all right for the present, then," he remarked, "and I'm infernally glad. Gad, the blighters are t'other side of the island! I never cottoned to that fellow Clifford," he said pensively. "Lord, I shall be glad when my turn comes! I could sleep—I think I could."

He looked drowsy, and something more.

"Let me take your watch," said I.

"No; thank you, old man, all the same," he replied. "I'll manage all right. It's been a bit tiring. But Davenant comes on presently. I'm all right."

He set down his lantern, and blew it out, for the light was steadily growing. Then he sat down by it under the barrier of scrub, and began to talk disconnectedly. Ten minutes later he was asleep, with his head against the zareba. I let him sleep, and remained by him in silence. Slowly the eastern sky brightened, and the dawn was about us. Mists hung about the sea, but the hills above us now took form and substance. I had for some time a sense of something menacing; of something imminent and impending. It was a curious physical sensation of being within the influence of some alien thing. And now the explanation forced itself upon me. Out of the night with its faded stars grew a great shadow; it built itself obscurely above me, and then gradually materialized into substance. And the shafts of the early dawn illumined a pillar of rock, that rose from the fringe of the camp and towered to heaven above us.

I recognized it at once from the name on the chart. The curious appropriateness of its style struck me, for the precipice had a strange resemblance to a gigantic pulpit. The rising ground of the island here reached its climax in a wooded peak some thousand feet high. But on this southern side the face had fallen away suddenly, and the descent was abrupt and precipitous. The stream ran in a lather of foam out of a small cañon between two naked cliffs of rock, and upon one side the arrête was formidable. The bare wall ascended sheer from the outskirts of the camp some five hundred feet. Then it curled over in a lip, forming a ledge, which appeared, from below, to be of some size. Above this again the wall resumed un-

til the top of the hill was gained, and here it once more turned and hung over the valley. Thus the two ledges projecting over one space gave to the precipice, as I have said, its odd likeness to an old-fashioned pulpit.

So far, then, the tale was true—the mad, wild story which had been pieced together from the gossip of a countryside, the rambling words of a dying man, and from an unauthenticated chart, by the enthusiasm of an idealist. Events had justified Halliday's faith up to this point. The island was here, and here was the site of the treasure-trove. The question to be answered now was —Was the treasure there? As I gazed upward, I reflected that this aerie in which the possessors had chosen to conceal it was almost in itself a corroboration of the story. The sun emerged from the mists on the water, and the young rays dashed the face of the cliff with fire. Somehow I was strangely stirred. The camp was enshrouded in silence, and lay dark beneath that glory; and I craned my neck and gazed——

The sound of feet aroused me. I came back to earth, and saw Davenant. He was some distance away, and his back was toward me. He, too, was looking upward. I called to him, and he started.

"You gave me a shock. I thought you'd disappeared," he said, and his glance fell on Marley, still slumbering at my feet.

"I'm afraid he's ill," I said.

He bent and examined him. "Something wrong there," he observed; "I don't like his looks. Let's cart him inside."

We lifted the sleeping man, who grunted, but did not wake, and carried him to his tent. The sleep was not natural; it looked, I thought, like a lesion of the brain. Davenant went out to take his watch, and I was just going to turn in when I heard a voice across the stream. I hurried down to the edge of the zareba, whither Davenant had already preceded me.

"Hear anything?" I inquired.

"Yes; it's them, right enough." He looked puzzled. "I can't make out why they weren't here before."

"Oh, I forgot I hadn't told you," I said, and told him.

He stared at me through his glasses. "That's smart," he said. "However, here they are."

"But we're in possession," I declared.

"Oh, yes, we're in possession"—he shrugged his shoulders—"if you call that possession." He pointed at the precipice.

Across the water figures emerged. The sun streamed freshly over Clifford's purple face, lighting it up. I shrank back so as not to be seen, but Davenant remained.

"It's only fair to give you notice," he called, in his neat voice, "that we will allow no one to cross this side of the river."

Clifford and the others of his party who had arrived turned their eyes on him, and for a moment there was silence. Then Clifford spoke.

"Great jujubes! he's got a fort, has Mister Wade. He's protecting his piccaninnies, is Mister Wade. He's the father of his flock, is Mister Wade. All right, governor, don't shoot and we'll come down. Any one got a drink?" he asked of his companions. "I could swallow a brewery. Byrne, you blighter, got a drink?"

The bushes rustled on the other side, and the party disappeared. It was not a very dramatic opening; indeed, it was rather mild. But I had no objection to offer on that score. Davenant turned to me.

"It's all right. They've got no stomach for anything just now. They're pretty well winded, thanks to you. Better turn in. You must be worn out."

I took his advice, and was soon sound asleep; nor did I wake until the sun was well up, and there was the report of gun-fire in my ears. I hurried out, and found the whole camp up and stirring. The sun was on the summits of the hills, and white upon the face of the precipice.

"What's the matter?" I asked the first man I met, Carter, who was handling a revolver in a slow, mechanical way.

"They're firing at the cliff, sir," he said.

"Who are firing?" I asked impatiently.

"The other chaps," he said.

I ran down to the water's edge, and stared across. The land rose a little, a hundred paces from the stream, into a small bush-crowned knoll, and from this I saw a puff of smoke emerge. There was a report, and a splinter fell from the rock in our rear.

"Damn' bad marksmanship!" ejaculated McLeod near me.

"Say, captain, hadn't we better take shelter?" asked Halliday, who was as restless as a cat on hot plates.

Wade, whom my eyes picked out now, did not move or answer. He was watching the mound across the stream.

"Now, what the deuce does this mean?" he said presently, in a puzzled voice.

"Can't you see?" said I. "There's a man with brains there, and I don't know who it is. They're not going to attack us. Oh, dear, no! They've started a shooting-range; that's all. No one can complain of that. In fact, it's a sort of patriotic training. Only their range happens to be athwart our objective, which is a nuisance for us."

"You mean——" he said, whipping round to look at the cliff. He was in full view of the mutineers, drawn to his full stature, an easy mark. Crack! a rifle rang out at that moment, and a sprinkle of dust rose under the Devil's Pulpit. "I believe you're right, Ned," he said excitedly. "Anyway, we'll test it."

He marched to the edge of the zareba, and climbed over. I called to him to come back, but he paid no heed, and stalked across the open space between us and the base of the precipice. He had gone no farther than a dozen yards, when there broke out from the knoll a splutter of rifle-fire, and patches of dust leaped from the wall. Wade turned, halted, and looked back. Then he rejoined us.

"Correct!" he said laconically, dusting his hands. "That's one to you, Ned; and that reminds me—by the Lord, Mr. Herapath, what in blazes did you mean by decamping last night? It's as near a thing to mutiny as I know next to that." He indicated the mound with his hand.

"I cry you mercy," I said. "It was an accident, and I couldn't resist the temptation." And I told him what had happened.

"That's all very well," he said, not so much mollified as I had anticipated. "But you must get this into your noddle—that orders must be obeyed. We can't afford to break up our bundle of faggots so as to be destroyed in detail. And then Miss Sylvester—blast it, man! you ought to have had more sense."

"All right," said I, in good humor. "I'll take it to heart. But I wish you'd see Marley. I think he's in for something."

"We're all in for something," he muttered, as he turned off.

Marley was dozing when we entered, and he looked up at us in a dazed way.

"By thunder, old chap, this is a bit thick!" he murmured vacuously.

I went in search of McLeod, who reported badly. There was lesion of some sort from the blow he had received, and it was necessary to treat the first officer as an invalid.

By eight o'clock our camp had the air of a picnic. From our store of provisions we had taken what was necessary, and a fire was blazing in the middle of the fort, at which we boiled water to make tea and coffee. We squatted down to a fine breakfast, at which, however, Miss Sylvester did not appear. I saw Wade coming from her tent a little earlier, and he sat down to his meal in an exceedingly cheerful mood. He was bright with sallies, being in possession now of his incurable spirit of adventure.

"We've not got a bad start," he said; "and we've always the ship to rely upon as a base. Digby can hold it against this herd out here. It's a fair picnic, Ned; quite like the woods behind your father's rectory, eh, when you ogled the pretty girls on Sunday-school beanoes?"

The mound was silent, and we had

heard no shooting for some time. It was the calm before the storm. Halliday, rapt in a sort of vision, was staring up at the cliff.

"Say, captain, this is bully for me," he said, in the tone of one who is indulging in a pleasant reverie. "We got here, all the same. I had a kind of premonition we'd come out on top. There's the Devil's Pulpit, right enough. I don't want to talk tall any, but what's happened to those that said the chart was faked?"

"They've climbed down out o' sight," said Wade good-humoredly.

"I reckon I ought to have changed the name of that steamer, as I thought of doing," went on Halliday. *"Bonne Aventure!* How would that strike you?" he asked anxiously.

"It has a pleasing sound," said Wade.

"When you size it all up, captain," said Halliday, "the loss of that map and the documents ain't like being at all bad for me. I guess I get off those contracts now. I guess Byrne and Clifford don't count, anyway."

"Well, I wouldn't be certain they do," remarked Wade indifferently. "But the point is, what are we going to do? I'm at your service, Mr. Halliday. I'll steam for Bristol to-morrow, if you like —or I'll stay here. There are worse places for a picnic."

"I guess we're going to stay here," said the American, with a smile. "And I guess we're going to get those dollars."

"How?" I asked bluntly.

He regarded me dreamily. "If I can't puzzle out a way within four-and-twenty hours, they have my full permission to walk off with the swag," he said confidently. "What I say goes. I didn't reckon on you and Captain Wade to help me out with it, only to dump me here. But, as you've come along to give a helping hand, I'll shake, and be grateful. But the reckoning's up to me, and it's me that's got to do the thinking. I rather guess I'll start right away."

He rose as he spoke, and went toward his shelter of branches.

"That's all very well, Ned," said Wade. "But where do we come in? And what are we going to do? I don't feel disposed to go to sleep, do you? While our friend is plotting, what's to become of us?"

He was going toward the zareba wall with a purposeful expression, when Miss Sylvester came through the trees, and he swerved aside to her, his face wreathed with a smile. This was the old Wade, the characteristic Wade; the Wade I tolerated but did not respect. I turned my back on them and went down to the stream.

The water was bubbling deeply, and heavy boulders were visible at the bottom. I looked up toward the gorge, which, as I have said, was a cañon in miniature. The stream issued from this not more than fifty yards higher in a rush of black water. The bank below the gorge on the mutineers' side was fringed with low-growing bushes. It seemed to me that any one in the water and bending low might not be visible from the mound which they had made their headquarters, and from which they conducted their rifle-practise. Yet, if one were to follow the stream up into the dark and narrow cañon, would anything be practicable?

It looked doubtful. The cliff could be sealed, no doubt, and the Pulpit reached from our side, because, according to the evidence, it had already been done. But we were barred from the venture by the rifle-fire, which, I had come to the conclusion, would be no respecter of persons. They meant business, these mutineers. Who was it that had inspired them, and kept them so well in hand? I could not believe it was Clifford. It might be Byrne, of whom I knew little; but I doubted it. On the whole, I inclined more to suspect Crashaw as being the brains of the rising.

Halliday, then, was to think out a plan for the discomfiture of the rebels, while we were to await his inspiration. This did not suit Wade's restless nature; he was for action at once; and he cast about in his mind for something to do. He was content enough in his flirtation; but that, after all, could not

occupy the day very well; so I was not surprised when he made a proposal at our midday meal. Miss Sylvester attended this, which went agreeably enough. Poor Marley was ill, but the rest of us were present, and in good spirits.

Wade took command in his authoritative way, and with unusual good humor. He chaffed McLeod and myself, and carried on a series of rallies with Miss Sylvester which might have been appropriate at a picnic, but seemed out of tune with this grave business to which we were committed, and which he took now so lightly.

"I'll tell you what it is, Halliday," said he; "when we get those doubloons of yours, I'll buy one to hang round Miss Sylvester's neck as a souvenir. She's our mascot. You've observed that all along, haven't you?"

Halliday's eyes glowed on her, as if he pondered this deeply, and he replied:

"An American woman's always a mascot, I guess, captain, and I've known that long before you tumbled to it, with your dull British wits."

Miss Sylvester laughed. "Oh, if I only could bring you luck with the treasure!" she cried fervently.

"You'll always bring luck," said Wade, with a particular bow; and to Halliday: "Well, we're burning with impatience to know what real American wits are going to devise. How are we going to lay our hands on these same doubloons?"

"You leave it to me, captain," said the young man solemnly. "I've just hitched up my team, and got in going order."

"All serene," said Wade. "And I'm going to amuse myself meanwhile." To me later he added: "Ned, I'm going across to inspect this camp."

"The mutineers?" I asked.

He nodded. "Hang it, man! do you think I'm going to sit down tamely under this?" he asked. "They're going to get their marching-orders."

"They won't heed. We've got far beyond that," I said.

"I'm captain," he said, with his old swagger, "and I'll earmark the beasts somehow."

"If you provoke a row——" I said, and shrugged my shoulders.

He turned on me angrily. "Provoke a row!" he said. "I'd like to know on what pretext you can apply the phrase to me. I'll give my orders, and, by the Lord, I'd shoot, for two pins! It's rank blackmailing, and I'm entitled to."

"All right," said I cheerfully. "I suppose I've got to make the other corpse."

He grinned, as the petulance left him. "Anyway, we may learn something," he said. "Yes, I'll take you."

It was in the middle of the afternoon when we started, slipping across the rushing stream under the cover of the protecting bushes. The mutineers had been silent since the morning, and we saw no signs of them, except the movement of a distant figure from time to time on the mound, from which a thin smoke ascended, witnessing to the camp. Wade and I proceeded warily through the undergrowth, and pushed our way through the trees in the direction of the mound. We were armed with revolvers, but we did not make a show of them; they were in reserve for an emergency.

We had covered half the distance, when a tall, gaunt figure emerged into the open, rifle in hand, and stood staring at us. It was Crashaw, with his bold, protruding eyes and savage air of demand; but he said nothing. His attitude was in itself a query. It demanded an answer of us.

"While you are holiday-making, who's your boss?" said Wade shortly.

Crashaw made a signal, and out of the undergrowth stole two more armed hands. He answered nothing, but the three stood watching us. Wade strode forward, with his hand in the pocket that held the revolver; he walked straight toward Crashaw, who stood aside as he reached him. Wade passed on, and Crashaw followed. The other men took up a position, one on each side of us, and together in this curious fashion, with this strange escort, we reached the camp.

The too-familiar voice of Clifford came to me, as we neared it; and when we broke into view I saw he was play-

ing cards with Byrne. Our appearance caused a diversion.

"Remember that's a jack-pot, my son," said Clifford, as he put down his cards. "Cheer-oh, captain! I take this kindly."

"Who is bossing this show?" demanded Wade.

"Meaning this interesting exploration company?" said Clifford. "My honorable friend on the left." His hand indicated Byrne, whose Irish grin broadened.

"Goin' to take a hand, captain?" he asked. "There was a man I knew once that was in love with a gurl, and she gave him the chuck after a time, and took up with his friend. Well, ye don't suppose he took it badly, do you, captain? Not he; he just swore, and says he: 'I'll be darned if I'll lose a wedding-breakfast, anyway!' he says, and he offered himself as best man."

"What are you going to buy me when you come into your fortune, Byrne?" demanded Clifford.

"Six of Scotch would suit you, jacko," said his friend.

"Antimacassars and maiden aunts!" exclaimed Clifford. "Have I not give you the eddication of a gen'leman? I want something lofty and high-toned—say a 400 h. p. Panhard, eh?"

"I suppose," said Wade, his anger showing in his rising color, "that you know what this means?"

His was not the disposition or temperament to deal with such creatures as these. He was too impulsive, and they needed a coolness correspondent to their own.

"Blank sanguinary mutiny, don't you know!" said Clifford, swigging at a bottle which lay beside him.

"That's so," said Wade, controlling himself; "and the penalty for mutiny is—death."

Clifford took up his cards. "I'll come in," he said. Wade was now on a tide of passion, and I feared for the situation. I plucked at his sleeve, but he threw me off angrily.

"I order all you men aboard at once," he called in a loud voice. "Return to your duties at once."

The thunder of his tones arrested the other mutineers in the camp, who gazed at us with interest and wonder. Clifford and Byrne went on playing, and Crashaw remained immovable, gun in hand.

"This is your last chance," thundered Wade.

"That fly annoys me, Byrne," murmured Clifford. "Pop it off."

"If you've not returned to duty by six o'clock this evening, I shall know how to deal with you," said Wade, delivering his last shot.

"I'll trouble you for that quid," said Clifford to Byrne, raking the cards toward him. "And the penalty is death!" he shouted, as he shuffled. "Death!" He drawled it out melodramatically.

Wade took one step toward him, and towered over him menacingly. A look of alarm entered Byrne's sallow face, but Clifford glanced up indifferently, and the two men's eyes met and held each other for some time, Clifford's inscrutable, dark, and shining. Then he dealt.

"Death in the jack-pot!" he murmured. Wade turned abruptly away, and walked swiftly down the rise.

"Target-practise begins at 5 P. M. sharp," shouted Clifford after us.

Wade spoke no word until we reached our camp; he was raging mad. He went through the camp giving orders curtly, took no notice of Davenant and myself, and was sarcastic to Halliday. In his temperament was a good deal of vanity, and he had been humiliated by two common scoundrels. But in his character was good humor, also, and that brought him round, together with an obstinate resolution which came uppermost with his better temper.

"The face of the cliff can be scaled," he said, eying it. "Just round the corner I think there is a funnel or chimney you can climb."

"There must be some means of access," I answered.

"I'll see," said he, and started.

"Don't do it, Wade," I said. "It's risky."

He paid no heed, but began to climb the barricade.

"Wade, don't!" I called.

He turned a determined face on me. "Do you take me for a common or garden engineer, Ned?" he said, with a set smile. He leaped down the other side and waved his hand.

I will admit that I had no clear notion in my head as to his aim or intention. I vaguely assumed that we were to have a repetition of his previous experiment, and that he was putting them to the test. That was why I made no further protest, which, indeed, would have been useless with a man of Wade's temperament. And so I waited somewhat anxiously and curiously for the warning rifles. But Wade had got half-way across the open space, and no report came. Was it possible—I asked myself—that the mutineers had been caught napping? Wade went briskly with that alert and athletic air that characterized him, and was now three parts of the way to the cliff. An exclamation near drew my attention momentarily to Davenant, who was staring alternately at Wade and toward the mound from which we expected those shots. His face was drawn with anxiety.

"He would go. Why are they silent?" I said.

The eyes of the whole zareba were following our captain. Davenant took no notice; it seemed as if he had not heard. Wade reached the cliff, turned, threw up his hand again in a graceful, swaggering gesture, and then pitched slowly forward against the wall. Simultaneously a loud crack rent the air and echoed from the precipice.

A woman's cry, terrified and long-drawn as a sob, came to us, and out of the tail of my eye I saw Miss Sylvester clutching at the brushwood with a wildly startled expression on her young face.

CHAPTER XII.

OPEN WAR.

A confluence of voices assailed my ears in the instant. Instinctively I jumped forward and seized Miss Sylvester by the arm.

"Come away!" I said.

"Good Lord, they've shot him!" cried McLeod, running up. "They've shot him, man! Let's wipe 'em out!" He leaped on the barricade, and gesticulated grotesquely, waving his arms in the direction of the mutineers' camp. I only caught some of his passionate utterances, for he was at fever-heat, and his words flowed from him in a froth. "Savage dogs . . . swine . . . Burn 'em, the brutes, in their dirty sties . . ."

As I held the girl, and she clung to me with terror in her grip, Davenant emerged suddenly from his stupor, and took command with an authoritative self-possession which afterward I could not but admire; and the more so that his voice was shaky.

"Carter! Smith!" he called. "Over with you for ambulance work." And he scrambled across the barricade, followed by the sailors.

The three moved out slowly and halted once some twenty paces away, turning to look in the direction of the mutineers. They evidently spoke together, and Davenant held up a hand. It looked from where I stood almost as if he begged for a truce. Then they resumed their way, and very slowly crossed the fatal reach. No shot was fired, and none of the enemy were visible. The rescue-party arrived without interference at the base of the cliff, and we could see the sailors stooping. Presently the three turned back, and the sailors were carrying something between them. And that was how Mark Wade perished under the shadow of the Devil's Pulpit.

For the bullet had passed through his heart, as McLeod testified when he had somewhat recovered his normal state, and Wade's last extravagance had been his death.

From that moment the conflict in which we were engaged took a new shape. I think we had all, insensibly, with that murder turned a corner. Blood had been shed, and the struggle was now a matter outside the range of civilization. We were fighting in a no man's land, without the pale of law, and obedient now only to primitive and

savage instincts. The mutineers had taken that step, and we were committed to join issues with them. The only alternative was to give in, to turn our back on the island, and sail away; and in the circumstances, with this bloody deed enacted in our presence, that was not to be considered. We settled all this at a conference that evening.

Wade's body was reverently bestowed in his shelter, and covered with a flag. His masterful will was at rest, but I think he would have liked to sleep in his country's flag. Halliday, who had been much shaken, and who looked ill, Davenant, pale but firm, McLeod, and myself met to consider the position. The alternative was broached, only to be dismissed summarily. We were resolute to see the thing to the end. These ruffians had declared war; war they should have.

Davenant, pending Marley's recovery, was now in charge, and he assumed the authority unobtrusively, giving his orders for the dispositions in his gentlemanly way. We had heard nothing of the mutineers since that fatal shot, and we did not know whether they might not follow it up by an assault upon the zareba. If they could shoot Wade in cold blood they were doubtless equal to such a venture. They had clearly thrown all scruples to the winds. For this reason we decided to keep fires burning all night. We had a plentiful supply of brushwood in our camp, and we were also free to come and go. This I determined at once by an experiment. I explored the wood around us, but could see no signs of the enemy. As I was returning, toward sunset, I met Davenant, who had apparently been on the same mission of discovery.

"Look here, Herapath, it won't do for us to carry on like this," he protested. "I'd no notion you were gone. We must have discipline."

I apologized, admitting my mistake, but explained my reasons.

"Well, it's a good thing to know," he said, "and it's been in my mind, too. I've just been following the course of the stream downward, and find it runs crookedly into a broadish creek below. I couldn't see any enemy, either; so maybe they're scared by what they've done."

I thought it likely, but pointed out that with such callous ruffians as they had proved we could not be sure, and I emphasized the danger of a night attack.

"Oh, we'll take care of that," he said confidently.

We lit fires in three places toward the stream and the southern barricade, so that any surprise from either side would be impossible. Davenant was of opinion that these would suffice, as the bush on the eastern side was so dense that it was not likely an attempt would be made from there.

"There's one thing," said Halliday, "and that's this Devil's Pulpit. They're likely enough to leave us alone if they can get at that; and under cover of darkness——"

"My dear sir, there are the fires," interjected Davenant impatiently.

"Well," said Halliday, with his nervous humor, "under cover of the fires, I guess——"

"He's right," said I. "The flame of the fires will throw darkness on the cliff side. They will have it their own way there."

"Very well," Davenant agreed rather reluctantly, as I thought. "We'll have a fire on that side, too, and Smith's our best shot, they tell me. We'll put Smith there."

This was arranged, and we settled down to a sad and troubled night in a conflagration of light. There was much to exercise our thoughts upon this first tragic night in camp. Marley was no better, and McLeod feared that an operation might be necessary, which would be impossible in our present situation. He and I discussed probabilities till a late hour. I could hardly believe that this was the same man who had caused so much trouble aboard, and whom poor Wade had marked out as the dangerous character. His superficial vices were all fallen from him like scales, and he stood forth in his strength and generosity as a man. When he had left

me I sat thinking, until a voice broke across the thread of my melancholy meditations.

"Mr. Herapath, I just simply can't sleep," said Miss Sylvester plaintively. "I can't get that out of my eyes, and I can't help hearing it all, too. Oh, I can't forget it."

"Sit and talk with me, then," I said soothingly. "I, too, want company. Thinking's bad at times, and I'm sure it is bad for you. Let's look at that smoke and the fire inside. Doesn't that remind you of the pillar of fire by night?" I made room for her by me, and she sat down with a little sigh. "Don't you find the power of association a wonderful comfort? There's comfort even in a phrase, a well-worn phrase. It is not the wind in those tropical palms I hear now; it is the low thunder of the organ in my father's church when I was a boy and listened to it across the intervening lawn and hedge as I lay abed of nights. And those pyres—have you ever sat out on a summer day when the couch-fires were alight in the fields? How homelike it can all be if one yields to the magic of old associations! We are not here on an inclement and inhospitable desert island, with the windy breath of the salt Atlantic in our nostrils——"

She shuddered and sank against me. "Oh, how monstrous and horrible that looks—that Devil's Rock. It comes out and goes back into the night with the leaping of the flames."

She nestled into me like a child, all else forgotten save her fear, and by the pressure of that warm and living body I was indescribably affected. A deep thrill went through me, and I put my arm about her. I had thought of her as a wayward and troublesome girl, as a coquette with little feeling, as of one self-conscious of her own beauty. And now I knew her merely for a helpless, dependent, and lovely woman. I had not been taken by her caprices and foibles; I was profoundly and unexpectedly moved by her weakness.

"Little girls," said I tremulously and foolishly—"little girls should all be abed by this time in sensible cabins on board sensible ships. I think we'll make a journey to-morrow, and see what the old tramp is about. Really, it would be very nice and comfortable there; now, wouldn't it?"

A faint "Yes" came to me, and then, as if she would apologize for this default of her hitherto brave spirit, she added: "It's that—it's Captain Wade, you know; I didn't mind before. I never knew things would be——"

Poor child! I had wondered how rude an awakening she would have from this romantic dream of hers, but I had not suspected that it would be so rude and so sudden. I looked across at the Pulpit, which at the base was lit as brightly as by a full moon in the flames of the fires. And then from the scene of the tragedy my eyes traveled upward along the dimmer outline, till they reached the summit. It wavered in and out of vision, as she had said, like a ghost that appears and disappears. It suggested something mysterious, something foreboding, something menacing even—that great wall, that bulging platform in the dusk above and the loom of the superior heights that vanished into heaven and night beyond all.

I gazed, piercing the gloom with all the might of my eyes, when I became aware of a darker blotch in that darkness above, a blotch that moved, as if it were a blacker lump of air in the surrounding space. I sat up.

TO BE CONTINUED.

A Flyer in Matrimony

By William MacLeod Raine

Author of "Robbers' Roost," Etc.

In which Ping-pong Pete butts into the elaborate little joke fixed up by a visiting newspaper man, who had singled out a well-preserved ranchman of fifty as the butt of his pleasantries

SHUCKS! Y'u're the 'steenth guy that's hit me with that question this mo'ning. This blamed man's town ain't nuthin' but a cross between a hen tea-party and a parrot that quituated from its studies with one sentence learned. First off, when I meet a lad on the street he turns loose the merry ha-ha on me, and soon's he can subdue his grin, wants to know how come I to do it.

'Course I recognize that son-of-a-gun Gin Rickey's fine hand in all this harassment the town's sufferin' on my account. He's playing to get even; but if he sat in that game a thousand years, I'd still be stacks of blue chips to the good. That's right, sonny! I sure did homestead a quarter section out of Old Man Good Luck's six hundred and fohty when I registered this claim for keeps.

Sho! What do I care if y'u are an old friend and do run the newspaper? Think I'm effervescing romances for a living like Richard Hardup Dooley or William Jeans Howls. There y'u go off again wrong foot first. Howcomes just bubble out of your mouth. Say, Johnny, howcome Miss Faro to find Moses in the bulrushes? Howcome Rattlesnake Jim to cash in from a mosquito-bite? Y'u tell me that, and I'll tell y'u howcome I to round up such a piece of solid gold, enameled luck on that Denver trip.

But if y'u'll drop round to my hacienda, I'll *show* y'u the best reason in Arizona why Ping-pong Pete roped that good luck when he see it amblin' his way. Thanks, no! I'm on the water-wagon. What business a see-date, settled citizen got fighting booze, anyway?

Now where was I at? Oh, yes. After me and Rickey had got rid of them seven car-load of steers we mavericked round Denver a few, getting our throats separated from the arid feeling and our pockets from the mazuma. And say! Right now I go on record to this effect—that Denver is an A1 town to turn your wolf loose in when y'u want to play with a paint-brush.

About the third day things began to slow down, and along in the shank of the evening I met up with Henry McAdams, Jr.

Henry, he butted into me at the Cambridge bar with an educated thirst it was sure a pleasure to irrigate. What Henry didn't know about fancy mixed drinks wasn't worth the attention of an investigating committee from the Kaintucky legislature, I reckon. We was thicker than Siamese twins soon; him paying strict attention to helping the cause of temperance by destroying as much wetness as he could, and me filling him plumb full of interesting misinformation concerning the career of Ping-pong Pete. Then, when he had garnered all the fiction I could hand him right off the reel about me being the

champeen bronco-buster and bad man of Apache County, I drifts casual to Rickey.

No, I disremembered to tell him that Rickey's color began to fade prompt whenever a petticoat come in sight, and that his beautiful blushes matched his red haid when one of the ladies looked his way. I plumb forgot all about Gin's shyness, and loaded Henry up with some kind of dope about Gin's coming to Denver to hunt a girl to marry. Henry, he had his spasm of forgetfulness, too, but I didn't know it till next day. He had forgotten to tell me he was a reporter.

But when I opened the *Bulletin* on the cold, gray dawn of the mo'ning after, I cut his trail for fair. He had us on the front page in red ink, me and Gin, and he ce'tainly had done us proud. We was the real white-haired lads from Arizona.

But what made a ten-strike with me was the way Henry had warmed to Gin's matrimonial hopes. He shorely did work that for all there was in it.

According to Henry, Mr. Eugene Richey was sure pining for the joys of connubial infelicity. He had the matrimonial fever bad, and it was the chance of a lifetime for any young woman of pleasing appearance and even temperament, between the ages of twenty-five and thirty-five, to marry a well-preserved ranchman of forty-eight, that would sure stay hitched, warranted kind and sound, worth two hundred thousand plunks invested in cows and cactus.

Henry's unfiltered imagination further expounded that Mr. Richey was eager to settle fifty thousand on the lady the day she changed her name. He explained that Mr. Richey would be at the Cambridge Hotel, Room 311, between the hours of ten and twelve, to any applicants for the position mentioned of wife to the aforesaid Eugene, kind and sound; and that it was his desire to meet every lady who would care to consider the proposition. And would the ladies please come early and avoid the rush, going right up to the room without bothering the clerk?

Say, that hit Ping-pong Pete plumb on the funny-joint; and there was me lying on the bed kicking up my heels and cackling with silent joy. Why silent? Because Eugene Richey, kind and sound, and a heap anxious to commit himself to double harness, was sitting there with his back to me perusing another page of that same paper, most unsuspectful of how he was liable to be the most popular man in Denver inside of ten minutes.

The more I gave myself to a serious consideration of Mr. Eugene's popularity the more onserious I became, and the more necessary it was to restrain my gladness by chewing a pillow. I dassen't look at him, for if I squinted his way the founts of my happiness was liable to uncork. There sat Gin, the coyest old bach on Bitter Root Creek, easy and onconcerned as a burro eating an empty tomato-can, while the ladies of Denver was putting on their best complexions and their Sunday go-to-meet-him hats for to enslave him. It most ce'tainly was a situation to promote gaiety, as Harvard Bob used to say before he met up with that rope accident that yanked him over the divide.

"This here paper says President Teddy has been talkin' some more about race suicide, Ping-pong. The guy writing it allows that Congress may put a tax on bachelors."

"Is that right? Y'u don't want to wait for that, Gin. There's some right nice ladies in Denver. Maybe if y'u gave them some encouragement——"

"Sho! Y'u talk a heap of foolishness, Ping," says Gin, blushing some. "I ain't the marrying kind, and y'u know it blame well. What a sane man——"

"Kind and sound," I slides in sorter soft.

"What a sane man wants to hitch up with trouble for is a heap more than I can savvy. Don't y'u reckon I know when I'm well off?"

"'Course there's that yellow-haired gyurl down to Tombstone y'u used to be so sweet on; I disremember her name. But Jim Daily sashaid in, and she went off and married him."

"Never was sweet on her," snorts Gin. "Never would look at a female. Y'u couldn't hire me to marry. I'd as leif herd sheep."

"Scared of them?" I asked, awful sympathetic.

"No, sir, I ain't. I just don't want no truck with them."

It was right then the kid with brass buttons butted in. "Lady to see Mr. Richey," he sings out.

Gin came round like some one had drawed on him. "To see me?" he yells.

"Yessir. Says she's got to see you right away."

Fine! Y'u had ought to have seen him try to grow white and red at the same time.

"I guess not. It's Ping-pong here she wants to see. I don't know no ladies in Denver," he blurts out.

"To think that my bosom friend, Gin Rickey, would thusly deceive me," I sighs, and wanders casual like into a home-made range song:

> I want mighty bad to be married,
> To brand a gyurl for me own,
> I ce'tainly want to be married,
> To have a gyarden and a home.

"Oh, y'u cork up," says Gin, some unpolite. "Y'u'd a heap better go down and see this here lady of yours."

"I reckon it's little carrots y'u'll raise in that gyarden of yours, Gin," I tells him, with my eyes on his topknot. "Well, I never did have no objections to red haids myself. Some thinks they're——"

"See, here, Ping!" sweats Gin. "Ain't y'u going down to see that lady?"

I shakes my haid. "'Course I'd like to help out a friend, but if y'u been tramplin' on human hearts, I reckon y'u got to pay the piper."

No, I wasn't buying chips in that game—not to any extent. I just set back and blessed Henry McAdams, Jr. For right then the uniform that was wearing that kid disappeared prompt, and give place to the Beginning of the Stampede.

She was some angular, and no spring chicken at that. She wore short skirts and an awful determined aspect. In size she wasn't so much, but she perspired energy to beat a Seattle real-estate dealer.

"Mr. Eugene Richey?" inquires she, with a smile that warm it would have warped a two-by-four.

She headed for me, but I dodged, and steered her over toward Gin. He got up looking awful scared, and barricaded himself behind a Maurice chair.

About a yard from him she stopped, clasping her skinny hands like she was struck all of a heap with his beauteous appearance.

"And is this he—is this the noble-hearted Arizonian whom I adore?"

Gin he went three shades of red deeper, and looked like he had swallowed a pincushion. "I reckon not, ma'am. I—I ce'tainly ain't he. Mebbe this other gent——"

She jest stood frozen to that spot, her eyes hogtied right to him like she couldn't get them loose. "'Tis he; 'tis Eugene—my Eugene."

"That's right, ma'am. Go to him," says I. "He's a little shy—that's all. But y'u'll find him kind and sound, and an Angora goat ain't any tenderer than Eugene."

I reckon that female slat would have married him out of hand if she hadn't been interrupted kinder sudden. But what chance has a worthy and estimable spinster, who admits to being twenty-six and doesn't look a day over fohty-six—what chance has she got when a stampede breaks into the room and spoils the theatricals for fair?

Gentlemen, hush! Honest, I never knew th' was so many unhitched ladies anywhere as came stampeding after Eugene Richey, kind and sound. Say, Room 311 wasn't a circumstance. That hotel milled up so turrible full there wasn't space left to put a square meal in it. They swarmed up the stairway and fought for position most earnest. The overflow filled up the street for blocks, and was a menace to traffic some, I guess. I reckon Denver never had a bargain-day rush so joyous as that football-game in the Cambridge

Hotel, when poor old Gin Rickey was the football. Before he got ontangled from that little experience he ce'tainly looked like a remnant, all right, all right. For the way that bunch of deceived ladies with the punctured feelings made mince-meat of poor Eugene was a caution to all similar villains who wantonly play with the most sacred cords of the human heart.

Statistics says there is two hundred and fifteen policemen in Denver, and I bet, without coppering, two hundred and fifteen of them was called out to subdue that riot of even-dispositioned ladies between the ages of twenty-five and thirty-five. And even at that it took them several hours to straighten things out. For what is one policeman among one lady bent on matrimony?

When the sounds of conflict had died away, and me and Rickey was at last alone with our damaged remains and his conscience, I expect I was some severe with him for coming down to Denver and trying to play wholesale with the hearts of its lady population; and Gin, though he was loaded to the guards with unworthy suspicions, was that broke in spirit he didn't climb my frame and try a fall with your uncle. Wouldn't that reach y'u—and him a cowman from the Aravaipa country!

Well, the upshot was that the manager of that hotel figured he could get along without guests so popular with the fair sect as me and Gin seemed to be. Consequence is, he give us notice to vacate. So Eugene he sets out to run down another camping-ground for us, while I puts the squaw-hitch on our outfit so as to be ready to move.

All this time, mind y'u, though the stampede was over, a dribbling stream of would-be's was showing up at the Cambridge, and the clerks and bell-hops was busy fending them off by telling them they was too late, because Mr. Eugene Richey was married already, and started on his honeymoon.

I had just finished getting together our tooth-brushes and our etseteras, when there come a soft little knock at the door.

I sings out "Come in," and she came, timid as a fawn, but dead set to see it out, even if she was scared plumb stiff. I found out afterward she had come up the back way so as not to be seen.

Right here, sonny, is where I'm giving y'u a warning not to get your hoofs on the grass. I'm telling y'u this story so y'u can put at rest any unfounded rumors; but if y'u get gay and publish too much, there will be a shyness in the editorial department of your paper that will need permanent replacing.

I don't know that y'u could rightly call her pretty. Just on brassy good looks she wasn't a cipher to that biscuit-slinger at Epitaph that gave y'u the G. B., Johnny; and her dress was about a hundred years out of fashion, mebbe, and patched to beat the band. But somehow when a fellow had looked at her oncet he wanted to look again. Her eyes had that same expression a child's has when the kid is in trouble—fact is, she wasn't much more'n a kid. There was something kind of forlorn and sweet about her that laid a finger right on a fellow's heart.

"Is this—air yuh—can yuh tell me where Mr. Richey is, sir?" she made out to say, though she most choked in her brown little throat before the softest voice outside of heaven piped out the question.

Oh, Lord! How could I guess my durned foolishness was going to hit this precious little lamb. I tell y'u I don't ever want to feel more like a horse-thief than I did right that minute, with those big, shy eyes fixed on me so frightenedlike.

"Won't y'u come in and sit down? Mr. Richey is out right now," I said, plumb sick of myself for what I had done.

"No, I—I 'low I'll—call again."

"Was it about that piece in the paper y'u wanted to see him?" I asked, just as gentle as I knew how. "I'm his pardner, miss, and y'u may speak before me if y'u will."

She gulped out "Yes." But shy—— My sakes! that don't begin to tell it. There ain't a word in the dictionary can show the shame and embarrassment that poor child suffered, she standing

there helpless, with the color flying in spots on her cheeks.

Y'u can bet I elected myself major-domo right prompt, and took charge of things at once, just like I was her long-lost friend. I led her to that Maurice chair, and made her sit down in it. Then I drew another chair up beside her.

Curious? Oh, mebbe I was some interested to know howcome a girl like that to be where she was; but I reckon the main part of my interest lay a heap deeper than curiosity.

"Now tell me all about it," I says. "Don't y'u be afraid I'll misunderstand y'u, either. I'm going to be your friend, little girl, if yu'll let me be."

That little girl—I swear she wasn't a day over eighteen, and awful young and inexperienced at that—hung her haid and twisted her handkerchief into a knot till y'u could have shoved it down the barrel of a .22.

"I cayn't tell yuh," she purrs out presently.

Mebbe I let my hand wander over her pretty hair just for instance. "Y'u tell me what the trouble is, honey," says I. "Why for do y'u want to break into this matrimonial game, and that with a teammate y'u ain't ever seen, and old enough to be your daddy, with years to loan at that?"

I had to stoop right low to get her answer; and when I got it, y'u might have knocked me over with a crowbar. What she murmured was: "Fifty thousand dollars."

Mebbe I froze up some at that. Anyway, I says: "The paper specified from twenty-five years up. Y'u ain't that old."

"I'd like a heap——" She broke off, but pretty soon came at me with a voice shaking like an aspen: "Do I *have* to be that old?"

"I reckon y'u better tell me that story," says I, none too friendly.

So she told me her pitiful little story; me sitting there real wishful to take her in my arms to comfort her soon as I got the gist of it. Seemed that her folks had always been unlucky and hard up. They had come from Tennessee, where they had been renters. She was the oldest one of a family of six. About four months ago they had tore up roots and moved out to 'Frisco. Then the earthquake came, and they lost what little they had. Taking advantage of the free transportation offered them by the Union Pacific, they had come east as far as Denver. But now they hadn't any money left, and they did not know what to do. There wasn't anything left for them back in Tennessee; and her father was too sick to work, anyhow. It was while she was casting about plumb desperately for something to do that she saw the *Bulletin* and its fool lies about Gin's matrimonial plans. She couldn't let her family starve, so she had caught at a straw to save them by sacrificing herself.

When that plucky little seventeen-year-old looked up in my face so trustful, and asked if I'd tell Richey she had been there, and say a good word for her, I plumb had to go to the window and turn my back. For I was making a goat of myself, like I hadn't done since I was a boy of fohteen.

She followed me, slow and timid, for a step or two.

"I'd try real hard to do like he wanted me to. I 'low he'd find me a good worker, maybe, if he'd give me a chanct," she pleaded.

Sonny, that lump in my throat was big as a ham. I knew I ought to rise up on my hind laigs and tell her I was a low-down coyote and a fraud.

And that's just what I did. Y'u can bet your last cent I didn't make it easy for Ping-pong Pete. No, sir, I told the truth about me right off the bat, she standing there white as a new fall of snow. Soon as I was through she turned to go without a word, but I caught her by the hand.

"Cayn't y'u say y'u forgive me, child?"

She just gave me one look, plumb full of heart-break. "What will you-all think of me for coming to—to—and him a man I had nevah seen?" And right then she broke down and leaned against the wall, sobbing her plucky little heart out.

"I'll tell y'u what I think," says I; and it's none of your damn' business where my arm was. "I think y'ure the gamest little lady I ever see. I think the Circle A B Ranch is suffering for a mistress like y'u, and its owner is asking y'u if y'u'll take the job and make him grateful till kingdom come. I reckon there's ranch-houses on the Circle A B big enough to hold yer whole family, and never know the difference."

That brought her up the way my pinto does a roped cow. She turned those big, soft eyes on me, and mine wouldn't give a thousandth part of an inch. I looked so steady that the roses come flying to her cheeks again.

"You-all air asking me out of pity," she said, sobbing way down deep in her round little throat.

"I'm asking y'u because I love y'u, and cayn't get along without y'u, little girl," says I.

Her long lashes fell softly, but she came back with:

"Y'u don't even know my name."

"Y'u don't know mine. We're even there," I laughed.

"I 'low you-all would be sorry in a little while."

"Not unless y'u were. Do y'u like my looks, Miss Tennessee?"

Up came them long lashes to look me over. "Yes, sir. I think y'u air good," was how she hit me.

"That ain't it. Do y'u think y'u could learn to love me?"

Down went those lashes again. "I reckon I could."

That's all there is to it, sonny. I'm telling y'u this so as y'u can scatter around the right impression. I'd hate anybody to think my little lady wasn't the salt of the earth, as they might do from the way I met up with her, unless I told it right out to some of my friends. Say, come out to the Circle A B over Sunday and see for yourself.

EVER TRIED THIS?

THE younger man had been complaining that he could not get his wife to mend his clothes.

"I asked her to sew a button on this vest last night, and she hasn't touched it," he said.

At this the older man assumed the air of a patriarch.

"Never ask a woman to mend anything," he said. "You haven't been married very long, and I think I can give you some serviceable suggestions. When I want a shirt mended I take it to my wife, flourish it around a little, and say, 'Where's that rag-bag?'

"'What do you want with the rag-bag?' asks my wife. Her suspicions are roused at once.

"'I want to throw this shirt away; it's worn out,' I say, with a few more flourishes.

"'Let me see that shirt,' my wife then says. 'Now, John, hand it to me at once.'

"Of course, I hand it over, and she examines it. 'Why, John Taylor!' she is sure to say, 'I never knew such extravagance! This is a perfectly good shirt. All it needs is——' And then she mends it."

The Perfume of Madness

By J. Kenilworth Egerton

Author of "The Adventure in the Petticoat Maze," Etc.

Being a Unique Adventure in the Career of Tommy Williams, Artist, Hypnotist, and Detective

(*In Two Parts—Part I.*)

ON all the continent of Europe there is no busier man than Le Garde, the chief of the French secret police; but while his brain is charged with a mass of detail which would overwhelm a less disciplined organ, and his shoulders carry a weight of responsibility under which many strong men would break, he is never so fully occupied as to be unable to find time to study new men or methods which may be of interest or value to him. Within his own province he is supreme and an autocrat; many of his most trusted and valued assistants are known only to himself, and he directs every inquiry from the investigation of the most insignificant crime against individuals to the watching of conspiracies aimed to overthrow the state itself. With such manifold cares and responsibilities, it speaks volumes for the charm and interest of my friend Mr. Thomas Williams' personality that Le Garde formed the habit of dropping in almost daily at the charming studio apartment which Tommy and I occupied together on the Boulevard Saint-Germain.

On the present occasion the conversation had drifted to woman. "The queerest, but the most interesting, creatures on earth," Le Garde was saying, as he appreciatively puffed a fragrant Egyptian cigarette from a box which did not bear the seal of the government monopoly, and watched Tommy prepare the equally fragrant café à la Turc.

"Confound 'em, they're past all understanding!" exclaimed Tommy ungallantly as he removed the coffee-pot from the brazier at the moment its bubbling contents threatened to boil over.

Le Garde watched him with twinkling eyes as he deftly turned the foaming liquid into the eggshell cups.

"I almost agree with you," said the Frenchman, laughing. "In a long experience I have known many women, and I have seen them under all circumstances; but never have I met two alike, nor never have I been able to predict from previous experience how one would behave under given conditions. For instance, a case which was brought to my observation to-day presents a phase of femininity which I am entirely at a loss to understand."

"That a pastmaster is fallible should make a novice patient under many defeats," acknowledged Tommy, under the soothing influence of his favorite decoction. "Is it possible for you to tell us the circumstances?"

"When the morning papers appear they will be public property, and, so far as I know, no crime has been committed; so there is no reason for secrecy," answered Le Garde, after lighting a fresh cigarette. "It is a case of suicide, the victim a young woman of unusual beauty whose identity is as yet unknown; and only the unusual circumstances make it of especial interest. In

the first place, there is no apparent motive, for she was living luxuriously, and her jewels and a large sum of money were found in her dressing-bag; while it is inconceivable that a woman so beautiful should have been the victim of unrequited affection. The method employed was unusual, for drowning, poison, or charcoal asphyxiation is the usual choice of members of the fair sex who wish to end their lives, and the fact that she shot herself was the reason for the occurrence being at once reported to me."

Tommy looked at him inquiringly, and Le Garde hastened to explain.

"On the theory that an apparent suicide may, in fact, be a carefully concealed murder, I have issued instructions that any case which is unusual shall be immediately brought to my attention that I may examine into it before telltale evidence may be inadvertently destroyed. Of course, as a matter of routine, I learn of every case in the daily reports; but with my manifold duties I cannot go into all of them. The fact that this woman's death was caused by a pistol and that her identity could not be at once established brought it into the category of unusual cases, and within a half-hour of the discovery I was on the spot. I found nothing to make me suspicious that a crime had been committed, however, but much to puzzle me."

"If she left no letter of adieu, or explanation, it would be another unusual circumstance," said Tommy; and Le Garde nodded.

"Yes, but in that she conformed to tradition, and only the form of the epistle was peculiar," he said, taking a paper from his pocketbook. "This was found on her writing-desk." He handed over the paper, and Tommy read it and gave a free translation.

To the Commissary of Police: No one but myself is any way accountable for my death. The reason I am ending my life would be of no interest to strangers, and there is no chance that my real name and rank shall ever be known. Public exposure of my poor mortal remains will not lead to identification, which would, in any case, serve no purpose. In my dressing-case will be found sufficient money to give me modest burial, and I pray you that it be accorded to me at once, just as my body is found. Above all, I pray that my hair shall not be in the slightest degree disturbed or disarranged.

Tommy looked at Le Garde expectantly when he had finished his translation.

"You see that it is written by a person of education, and probably a woman who has enjoyed position, for a person of no particular rank would not use that expression," he continued. "I may say that her appearance, her clothing, and the appointments generally bear out that theory. The wording of the note does not indicate insanity, for there is nothing of depression in it; it is clear, concise, and to the point. Only the closing sentence points even to eccentricity, but it is such an unusual request that I can make nothing of it."

"As you say, this note is evidently written by a person of education, but the handwriting is peculiar," said Tommy, who had been examining it closely.

Le Garde smiled. "A very evident attempt to disguise her ordinary chirography," he answered. "I noticed that, but I could see no reason for it, for not a scrap of her handwriting can we find with which to compare it."

Tommy had picked up an enlarging-glass, and, examining the paper closely, he suddenly raised it to his nose and sniffed.

"What a peculiar perfume!" he exclaimed.

Le Garde looked at him approvingly. "Evidently all of your senses are alert, Mr. Williams. Let me tell you another curious point in that connection. That sheet of note-paper—which you can see is unusual—corresponds exactly in tint, texture, size, and watermark with the blank paper in her writing-case; but about the remainder there is not the slightest trace of perfume. Her sachets, toilet-water, and perfume are all the same scent, Parma Violet, but not another article about her person or effects has the perfume of this note which, as you say, is most peculiar. In fact, it is one with which I am en-

tirely unfamiliar, although I have had occasion to make a more or less exhaustive study of perfumes. I have ordered that neither the body nor the chamber in which it was found should be disturbed—would it interest you to examine the scene and body of the suicide? It is not far from here—in the Rue de l'Echelle."

"The 'Street of the Ladder'—perhaps one which leads to adventure," answered Tommy, as he placed his empty cup on the tray. "I should esteem it a privilege, for you have aroused my curiosity most effectually."

The presence of a uniformed officer in the boxlike room ordinarily occupied by the concierge was the only indication that anything unusual had occurred in the quiet house on the narrow street leading off the Place de l'Opéra, but a man in plain clothes was loitering on the stairway, and he shook his head and expressively opened his hands to signify that they were empty when Le Garde asked him if anything new had been discovered. There was a twinkle in his eyes as he glanced from Tommy to me which made me look closely at him, and I recognized the grinning face of the cabman who had been so ubiquitous when Le Garde was watching us as suspicious characters.

The apartment to which we were admitted by another plain-clothes man was, as Le Garde had intimated, luxuriously furnished, and displayed evidence of taste and wealth; but there was an entire absence of photographs and the small personal things which give a place a distinctive and homelike atmosphere.

"No one has called, and I have discovered nothing new," reported the officer in charge laconically, and Le Garde motioned us to follow him into the adjoining room.

It was a large bedchamber, simply but tastefully furnished, the dressing-table covered with a profusion of the dainty articles which a woman finds use for in her toilet. On the bed, attired in a simple white evening gown and having all the appearance of being in a peaceful sleep, lay the body of a woman, only the waxlike pallor of the face betraying that it was the sleep which knows no awakening, and a powder-blackened spot on the left side of the corsage suggesting the cause.

Le Garde had not exaggerated her beauty; the straight nose, delicately chiseled lips, and high forehead gave her the profile of a classic cameo, and above the aristocratic face, as carefully dressed and arranged as if she had been going to a ball instead of the grave, was a mass of beautiful golden hair. Her arms lay at her sides, a small revolver loosely clasped in the palm of the right hand, the index-finger still on the trigger. The left hand, beautifully shaped and exquisitely cared for, lay half-open at the edge of the bed nearest to us, and Tommy, to whose artistic eye its beauty made strong appeal, stooped to look at it more closely. Suddenly he straightened up and beckoned to Le Garde.

"I think that one of your puzzles is solved," he said quietly. "I wondered why that writing seemed familiar, and here is the explanation." On the side of the second finger was a tiny ink-stain from a soiled penholder. "It is not disguised writing; it presents only the peculiarities common to the handwriting of all left-handed people."

Le Garde carefully examined the tell-tale ink-stain, and then looked at Tommy inquiringly.

"You are quite correct, Mr. Williams," he acknowledged frankly. "It does explain the peculiarity of the handwriting, but you solve one puzzle only to create a more serious one. Can you explain why a left-handed person should employ the right hand to hold a pistol?"

The discovery of the tiny ink-stain by Tommy's sharp eyes, and the deductions drawn from it, and the peculiarity of the handwriting, changed the entire aspect of the case. Le Garde's interest, which had been that of the student of psychology in the problem of motives, suddenly became that of the official whose duty it is to detect crime, for a grave doubt was raised as to the probability of the wound being self-inflicted, a doubt which he at once set himself to justify or disprove. He

passed to the other side of the bed and bent over the hand which held the pistol, carefully examining the position of the weapon; but when he straightened up his expression indicated even greater uncertainty.

"Perhaps the last puzzle is already answered; perhaps we are farther from a solution than before," he said doubtfully. "Until we have further data, I am unwilling to say that this is not a case of suicide; but of one thing I am certain—this pistol was placed in the woman's hand after her death!"

Tommy and I both bent to examine the hand in which the butt of the pistol loosely rested, but we could discover nothing which justified his conclusion.

"You have often reminded me that I am but an amateur, and I fear that I must acknowledge it, for I confess that I am unable to follow you in that deduction," said Tommy incredulously.

Le Garde shrugged his shoulders. "My dear sir, my investigation of this case—until your significant discovery put me on the right track—was unworthy even of a novice. This thing is so evident that I should have noticed it at once, for the apparent conditions are absolutely irreconcilable. I will demonstrate it to you."

He gently raised the right wrist, moving the hand as little as possible; but the pistol fell from it and clattered to the floor.

"This is the proof, if one knows how to read it," he continued, stooping to pick up the weapon. "Death from a bullet which goes through the heart or injures the great brain centers is generally instantaneous, as we measure time, but there is just that fraction of a second difference which in a case like this, for example, has a wonderful significance. Following the siege of Paris and the Commune, it was my unpleasant duty to be present at the execution of more than six hundred *communards*, and you may remember that they were led out in batches and shot. They invariably went down in one of two ways—either suddenly collapsing, as if their bones had been withdrawn from their bodies, or pitched forward or backward with uplifted arms and opened hands. Examination of the bodies afterward showed me that the manner of falling depended upon where the bullets struck them. Those who were shot in the head went down as does a poleaxed bullock; while those whose death came from cardiac injury pitched forward or fell back. Many times the hands of the former were tightly clenched; while the latter almost invariably clutched spasmodically at the grass for several seconds. I imagine that the reason for my deduction is now clear to you?"

"Perfectly—if that is an invariable rule," answered Tommy; and Le Garde smiled at the qualification.

"I hesitate to say that any rule is invariable, but the subsequent analysis of many hundreds of cases of suicide has failed to show an exception," he said. "In several cases where the pistol had been firmly held against the breast, it had been thrown so far away by the subsequent reflex gesture that its distance from the body raised grave doubts as to the wound being self-inflicted. In only one case was there apparent contradiction. The pistol was found firmly clasped in the hand of the victim; but a criminal who was shortly afterward executed for another crime confessed to me that he had held the fingers of the dead man—whom he had previously shot—in that position until rigor mortuis developed."

"A gruesome vigil!" exclaimed Tommy, with a shudder.

"But not so gruesome as the one which the condemned man keeps until *Monsieur de Paris* calls him for his last toilet," answered Le Garde grimly. "A man will force himself to do much to avoid risk of that; but it must have been a harder task to place a pistol in this hand if a man had been guilty of causing the death of such a beautiful creature. I should have small compunction in sending any one so heartless to the guillotine."

"May I ask if your sympathy will lead to the observance of the poor girl's last requests?" inquired Tommy.

Le Garde's lips settled into stern lines which belied the sympathy in his eyes

as he looked at her elaborately dressed mass of beautiful golden hair.

"Inclination and official duty cannot always be reconciled," he said regretfully. "It is imperative that there should be an autopsy, and I fear that the body must be sent to the morgue, unless identification is speedy and convincing. Your fortunate discovery has made a searching investigation absolutely necessary."

"Then I deeply regret that I ever entered this unfortunate room," answered Tommy dolefully.

Le Garde looked at him curiously. "Mr. Williams, I once told you that we do not encourage the amateur investigator of crime; but except for the absence of official connection with the police I hardly regard you in that light," he said significantly. "Perhaps you may be good enough to give me your assistance, and between us we may reach such a speedy solution that the routine may be avoided. Believe me, no association could be more agreeable to me nor more apt to lead to success."

For a moment a gleam of gratification came to Tommy's eyes; but all personal elation died out of them when he looked at the beautiful dead face, and when he turned to Le Garde his own expression was very Mephistophelean.

"Such assistance as it may be in my power to render is entirely at your service," he answered quietly, and Le Garde motioned to us to follow him into the adjoining room.

II.

The history of the case which we learned during the evening—first the bare outline from Le Garde and then the results of separate lines of inquiry from subordinates who had been detailed to work on it—was more interesting as an illustration of the French method of criminal investigation than enlightening as to the mystery surrounding the girl's death; for each report served to bring out a fresh complication. The house in which the tragedy had occurred was a *dépendance* of a neighboring hotel patronized principally by transient Americans; while the *dépendance* itself was usually occupied by strangers of other nationalities who made longer stay in the French capital. Such meals as were required by the guests in their apartments were served from the hotel restaurant; but otherwise the buildings were entirely distinct, and the *dépendance* had its own private entrance, concierge, and staff of servants.

"Madame De Sauvigny" was the name by which the dead woman had been known at the hotel, and she had arrived there three days before; the apartment being previously reserved by telephone by the Count De Thonier, who was a frequent patron of the establishment. She came to the hotel alone in a public cab, and during her brief stay there had received absolutely no visitors. According to the slip made out for the police, a formality required of all visitors to Paris, she was twenty-one years of age, a widow, and a resident of Geneva, Switzerland. Such meals as she had taken at home had been served in her apartment; but she had dined out each night, returning about midnight. The concierge was unable to say whether she returned unescorted; for in answer to her ring he had opened the front door with the automatic connection from his room, but watching through the window into the hallway he had noted that she entered alone. Two or three times each day she had been called to the telephone, and she had received seyeral letters; but if she had written any letters she had herself carried them to the post. The discovery of her death had been made by the chambermaid, who, believing that the lady had as usual gone out for dinner, had entered the apartment to prepare the bedchamber for the night.

The concierge was positive that she had received no visitors that afternoon, for he had been constantly on duty, and only guests of the *dépendance* had entered. None of the employees had seen strangers about the place, and the maids and valets were continually passing through the halls.

On her arrival the hotel proprietor

had received her personally, and he was convinced that she was a Frenchwoman, for her pronunciation was perfect and free from even the Swiss accent.

The waiter who had served her meals was equally sure that she was a German, for that was his native language, and she had given her orders in it, the only thing noticeable being that she had the soft pronunciation of southern Germany. He had served her with tea at four that afternoon, and noticed nothing unusual in her manner. He was, so far as any one knew, the last person who had seen her alive.

"And you have reason to believe that the name is an assumed one?" asked Tommy, when Le Garde had finished his recital.

"At any rate, it is unknown to the police of Geneva, who have, of course, a complete record of all their citizens," he answered. "Further than that, the note which she left implied that it was not her own. Our first endeavor was to ascertain what the Count De Thonier knew about her; but he left Paris the day she arrived, sailing for South Africa from Marseilles the following day. It will be at least three weeks before we can communicate with him, even by cable. He is a great sportsman and explorer, has been all over the world, and spends more than half his time in travel."

A knock on the door was followed by the entrance of a cabman escorted by a plain-clothes man, and he at once identified the body as that of a woman whom he had driven from the station on the arrival of the Calais-Dover express three days before. She had been accompanied to the cab by a gentleman who spoke with her for a few minutes in a language he could not understand, but which he was quite sure was not German.

Le Garde smiled grimly when he had dismissed him.

"Another piece of evidence that Madame De Sauvigny wished to cover her tracks," he said. "Her police-slip states that she came from Geneva via Basle. That train arrives at the same time as the Calais-Dover express, but at a station on the other side of the city. Now, Mr. Williams, here is our case. This woman has lived at the hotel for three days, arriving, presumably, from England. She is recommended here by the Count De Thonier, who will be inaccessible for at least three weeks. There is nothing in her effects which gives the slightest clue to her identity, and we have no proof that any one but the hotel servants was in her room during her stay. On the other hand, when she is found dead from a bullet wound, the proof is convincing that the pistol which apparently caused her death was placed in her hand after it had been discharged. The presumption from her handwriting and the ink-stain is that she was left-handed, which seems to be the most definite thing we know about her. The note that she left indicates that she deliberately committed suicide; but the contradictory circumstantial evidence suggests murder, or, at least, the fact that some one else was present at the time of, or shortly after, her death. The requests in her farewell note are peculiar; but the most puzzling thing about it is the mysterious perfume which is entirely distinct from that of the Parma Violet, which she used in all of her toilet preparations. You have all of the facts which I possess up to date, but I will tell you that I have a half-dozen men trying to locate the cabmen who may have driven her during her stay here, and practically any number of additional men are available if you can suggest any way in which they would be useful."

"The circumstantial evidence presents a mass of contradictions; but before trying to reconcile them, let us see if there is anything to be determined from the direct evidence," said Tommy cautiously, and I realized that he hesitated to give an opinion before Le Garde. "First, the Count De Thonier seems to be the most tangible person—how much do you know about him?"

"Practically no more than I have told you. He is a member of an old family, and his title is genuine. He is possessed of independent means and able to follow his own inclinations, which

seem to lead him into exploring out-of-the-way corners of the world and killing big game."

"And his age?"

"About thirty-two, I should judge," answered Le Garde. "His life here in Paris has, I believe, been discreet, and he has never been in any serious scrape that we know of."

"And are you convinced that it was he who engaged the apartment for this woman?" asked Tommy; and Le Garde shook his head.

"There is no evidence to the contrary, for we know that three days ago he was in Paris; but all that we know positively is that his name was used. If he did vouch for her to that extent, it is rather curious that he should not have called upon her before his departure."

"Exactly," answered Tommy seriously. "It would be quite possible for any one to give his name over the telephone, and knowing that he was setting out almost immediately on a long sea voyage an impostor would have little fear of discovery. Of course, I can venture no opinion as to who is concerned with the girl's death; but it is safe to say that the voice which came over the telephone, whether it belonged to Count De Thonier or some one else, could explain the things which seem so mysterious to us."

"And I should like very much to have the owner of that voice under my thumb!" exclaimed Le Garde savagely, as his eyes turned involuntarily to the door leading into the death-chamber. "As that is, for the moment, impossible, let us consider the other circumstances."

"Which naturally leads us to the note," continued Tommy. "Madame De Sauvigny was, judging from her appearance and surroundings, essentially dainty. It is improbable that the ink-stain could have remained unnoticed on her finger for any length of time, and on her toilet-table I noticed pumice and oxalic acid, which would have removed it easily. Therefore, it is probable that she used a pen shortly before her death, and the paper on which her farewell note was written corresponds exactly to the paper in her portfolio except that it is perfumed. If it were not for that mysterious scent, we might safely assume that her last epistle is the one which you have in your letter-case."

"And, if I am not mistaken, this gentleman can solve the mystery of the perfume," said Le Garde, rising and shaking hands with a middle-aged Frenchman whom he introduced to us as Monsieur Duclos, chief chemist and manager for the Maison Poirrot, the famous manufacturers of perfumes.

"Monsieur Duclos, I have come across a perfume which is entirely new to me, and, remembering the instructions you gave to me when I was engaged in the stolen-document investigation for the foreign office a few months ago, I am again calling upon you for enlightenment," he continued, taking his letter-case from his pocket, but Duclos quickly put out his hand to restrain him, and opened both of the windows.

"Before you produce it, we must purify the air," he said, sniffing, and I noticed that the edges of his nostrils quivered like those of a thoroughbred horse. "Here is the perfume of tobacco, which is delightful in its proper place; the scent of Parma Violet, which is always delicious; and"—after several audible sniffs—"I should say, the reek of gunpowder smoke, which is an abomination."

"How admirable is the perfectly trained faculty!" exclaimed Le Garde, with a significant glance at Tommy; and Duclos complacently accepted his tribute.

The fresh air quickly purified the atmosphere to his satisfaction, and he extended a fat, pudgy hand for the note. He was a good-natured, ruddy-faced man, with mild blue eyes which beamed benignantly through large, gold-rimmed spectacles; but no sooner had he sniffed at the paper than he let it fall from his hands, the color faded from his face, and his eyes became round with surprise and terror.

"The perfume of madness!" he exclaimed in horror. "What deviltry has it accomplished, that I find it in your

hands?" Le Garde picked up the note, and, after holding it to his nostrils for a minute, carefully replaced it in his pocket.

"From your very evident disapproval, I judge that it is not one of the preparations sold by your house?" he said interrogatively.

Duclos made a violent gesture of protest. "The Maison Poirrot has a reputation!" he exclaimed excitedly. "No other house can be allowed to possess secrets of which we are ignorant, and to us a new perfume may mean a fortune. In this we thought that we had discovered one which would surpass all others, and until this moment I believed that we possessed the entire existing supply of raw materials for its preparation; but rather than allow such a devilish thing to be sold the Maison Poirrot would go down in defeat and failure." Le Garde closed the windows, and, after telling the officer on duty in the hall that we were not to be disturbed, he turned to Duclos.

"I suspect that deviltry *has* been accomplished," he said sharply. "Now, Monsieur Duclos, time is an object. Kindly tell us all that you know about this perfume."

The chemist had, in a measure, recovered his equanimity, and he took the chair which Le Garde indicated by a gesture and drew a small leather case from his pocket. It contained several small vials, each holding perhaps a half-ounce of liquid, and selecting one of them he held it up to the light. The contents were of a pale amber color, but seemed to glow and radiate a peculiar light which was not entirely due to reflection.

"Gentlemen, were I to drop this small flask on the floor and shatter it, allowing the contents to volatilize in the confined atmosphere of this room, in fifty seconds we should all be madmen, tearing at each other's throats and controlled only by a lust for blood," he said dramatically; and as I noted the clumsiness of his stumpy fingers and the fragile glass held between them, I wished that Le Garde had left the windows open. "The contents of this vial represent the ultimate products of distillation of many hundredweights of flowers, and would be sufficient to prepare thousands of gallons of perfume more delicate than that of the note-paper; but that perfume will never be made; for, as I told you, it is the perfume of madness!" The dramatic instinct is inherent in the Gallic race, and Duclos paused impressively that its statement might have its full effect.

"I may say, gentlemen, that this case contains my failures," he continued, replacing the vial. "Each of these small flasks contains an essence upon which we built great hopes, and which, for one reason or another, it has been impossible for us to use; but none represents such great disappointment and financial loss as the perfume of madness. The flowers from which it was distilled were obtained at great expense after a sample had been submitted to us. It is a species of orchid which grows only in one spot, so far as we know; and that spot is itself unknown to us."

"Tell us all about it—where you got the flowers and from whom," interrupted Le Garde, a little impatiently; but Duclos looked at him placidly and refused to be hurried.

"All in good time, my dear sir; but it requires certain explanations," he said. "You must know that the Maison Poirrot employs agents and collectors all over the world, and they are constantly on the lookout for something new. Is an unknown flower discovered in an African jungle, who will pay so well for it as the Maison Poirrot? No one! Should a prospector for gold in the Andes find a blossom with a unique perfume, he is better rewarded than if he were successful in his original quest. Therefore we—that is to say the Maison Poirrot—control exclusively the *'Extrait Himalaya'* distilled from flowers which grow only on a single square mile of all this earth's surface; the *'Parfum des Incas,'* which comes originally from a Peruvian jungle; and many others which are inimitable. To gather the flowers many men die each year in pestilential swamps and others are killed by wild beasts and savages in jungle

and desert, that my lady may charm the most susceptible of the senses by the fragrance which she exhales."

"And incidentally that the proprietors of the Maison Poirrot may accumulate riches," remarked Le Garde dryly; and Duclos shrugged his shoulders.

"I prefer to think of it in another way, and to prove that we are not entirely mercenary, I shall tell you the history of our last failure," he protested. "It is now two years since our agents in Bombay sent to us a couple of dried specimens and a small cask of fat containing perhaps two hundred blooms of an orchid which was unknown to even the most enthusiastic collectors of that plant. From that small cask we distilled in our laboratory a minute drop of essence which was of such great power, such penetrating sweetness, and possessed of such lasting properties that we anticipated another triumph for the Maison Poirrot. We immediately cabled for full particulars, and ordered our agent to purchase the entire offering; but while he forwarded to us a considerable quantity of the blossoms, the particulars concerning their place of origin were most meager. He informed us that they were brought to him by a native who himself professed to be ignorant of where they grew, and claimed to be acting as the confidential broker for some mysterious firm. The directions as to picking the blooms and packing them in the fatty medium supplied by our agent were scrupulously carried out; but the only indication of the place where they grow is the fact that it required two months to deliver the flowers in Bombay after the order was given and the casks supplied. Many thousands of francs were advanced by the Maison Poirrot before the unlucky day on which those precious casks were delivered to our laboratory. Ah! gentlemen, that a tragedy was averted is due to the good fortune which has always followed us—the Maison Poirrot."

"And have you now arrived at the point of your story from which we may derive information which may be of value to us?" asked Le Garde sarcastically; and Duclos smiled.

"All information is of value, if one knows how to use it," he answered imperturbably. "For example, had I not known the danger of the condition which is known as 'seeing red,' I might now be a murderer, instead of a peaceful chemist and manufacturer of perfumes. The perfume was so unique that I personally superintended every experiment made in extracting it from the flowers during the tedious process of distillation, and when, after infinite care and labor, I succeeded in obtaining two drops of the concentrated perfume, I felt that the fortune of the Maison Poirrot was indeed assured. In the privacy of the innermost office I gathered the members of the firm to exhibit our newfound treasure, and I may say that each of them is my dear friend. Cautiously I inhaled the exquisite perfume which represented so much to us, and then prepared to pass the retort containing it to my senior. When I looked at him I could hardly believe my eyes, for a red veil seemed to be before them! I realized the danger of inhaling the perfume from any concentrated extract, but never had any perfume produced such an effect; for I was conscious only of the spot in his throat where a tiny pulsation betrayed an artery, and became possessed by an almost uncontrollable desire to tear it open. The glass retort fell to the floor and shattered; and the next few minutes will always be to me a nightmare which I should wish to forget. The respectable, sedate, and peaceful gentlemen who compose the firm suddenly became demented; the office where so many peaceful measures for the extension of the business of the Maison Poirrot have been planned was worse than the disturbed ward of a bedlam, and we bit, scratched, and pummeled each other as we rolled, a struggling mass, on the floor. We were saved from tragedy, gentlemen, only by the opportune interruption of our clerks, who, with rare presence of mind, broke open the windows and doors to come to our assistance and allowed the overpowering vapor to be dissipated. That room has been useless since. It has been washed, scraped, painted, and

papered, but the perfume of madness lingers in it. We have experimented with such peaceful creatures as doves and rabbits, but under the influence of the perfume of those devilish orchids they become mad and rend each other. The contents of this little flask represent the last portion of the distillation; there are no more of the flowers in France, and I can assure you that no more will be imported by us—that is to say, the Maison Poirrot. Gentlemen, it is well named the perfume of madness, and I am curious to know how you became possessed of it."

"Will you tell us first how much of the perfume it required to scent that note-paper?" asked Tommy eagerly.

Duclos smiled and made a gesture of helplessness. "Figure to yourself the most minute particle which would be revealed by the strongest magnifying-glass, and divide it into a billion parts. Divide each of those again by a billion, and perhaps the resulting fraction would scent all of the note-paper which has been manufactured for a hundred years," he said; and Tommy smiled in return.

"I could hardly make those calculations without pencil and paper. We will take it for granted that it is sufficiently minut.. Would it be possible to transmit the perfume directly from the flower, or would a chemical process be necessary?"

"To get the perfect product which shall be lasting, science must assist nature, or we—that is to say, the Maison Poirrot—would find our occupation gone," answered Duclos.. "I may say, however, that the dried flowers of this orchid retain their perfume to a quite unusual degree, and while its effect is not so marked as the concentrated extract obtained by distillation, it is still sufficiently powerful to excite the combative instinct, as I have demonstrated by careful experiments on men and animals."

"And would it be asking too much if I requested the loan of a blossom to confirm those experiments?" asked Tommy; but it was only at the earnest solicitation of Le Garde that Duclos would even listen to such a proposition. He finally gave a grudging assent, and promised to let him have it in the morning.

"Now I am prepared to satisfy your curiosity," said Le Garde, again drawing the note from his pocket. "This paper contains what purports to be the farewell message of a beautiful woman who committed suicide."

Duclos started violently from his chair and gave an exclamation of horror.

"Do not believe it!" he exclaimed. "Unless you have the evidence of your own eyes that death was by her own hand, use all of your wonderful skill to track down her murderer, for the death of one person will not satisfy the blood-lust which is excited by the perfume of madness!"

"Such skill as I may have will be used to solve the mystery, and I shall have the invaluable assistance of Mr. Williams," answered Le Garde, smiling; and Tommy, who was evidently wearied by the chemist's volubility, bowed his acknowledgment and offered his hand to him.

"To have a clear brain I must sleep," he said. "I shall be on hand in the morning and, perhaps, we can find a connection between the perfume and the lady's death."

III.

If any possible solution of the mystery surrounding the young woman's death had suggested itself to Tommy he kept it carefully to himself, and he was unusually quiet and thoughtful as we walked back to the studio. When our coffee was served the following morning he was in anything but a pleasant frame of mind—a sure indication to me that he had passed a sleepless night.

"I wonder if the working of the feminine and masculine minds are, after all, so dissimilar," he said, when the excellent café au lait had soothed his irritability. "It isn't uncommon for men to leave minute directions as to the disposal of their bodies after death, and when one remembers the beauty of the

dead woman's hair and her evident refinement, it is not difficult to understand a natural repugnance to having it mauled about by a morgue attendant, and I can appreciate that any one would loathe the idea of being stared at after death by the morbidly curious crowd which passes through that gruesome place. The requests in that note are to my mind the strongest indications that Madame De Sauvigny—as we know her—wrote it."

"Have you doubted that?" I asked, for it seemed to me that he was trying to banish an unwelcome uncertainty.

"If we admit the possibility of murder—which is the only excuse for our investigations of the case—we must certainly doubt that," he aswered. "Circumstantial evidence is always more reliable than direct, and it is only the ignorance displayed in weighing it which has brought it into disrepute; but in this case it presents apparent contradictions and conflicts with the human testimony. Take the case as it appears at the first glance, and it is nothing more than a rather unusual suicide. A woman is found dead from a bullet wound; the pistol from which that bullet was fired is still in her hand. There is not the slightest suggestion of a struggle having taken place, and on her dressing-table is a note which strongly supports the theory of suicide. The handwriting is that of a left-handed person, and an ink-stain on the finger of the dead woman indicates that she possessed that peculiarity, and that she had very recently used a pen; while the paper corresponds to that in her writing-case. No one, so far as we know, saw the deed committed; but the evidence of the concierge and the other servants is negatively confirmatory, for they unanimously assert that no one entered her apartment. So far it is plain sailing; for direct and circumstantial evidence agree, and everything points to suicide."

"And if the woman had not been beautiful that theory would probably have been unquestioningly accepted," I said; and Tommy smiled.

"Perhaps," he answered; "but while her beauty may have furnished a motive for her murder—if murder it is—it does not explain the mystery. At any rate, we find many contradictions. The woman is presumably left-handed, and the pistol is found in her right; but if we accept Le Garde's deductions—which, by the way, I do absolutely—that is explained, and the explanation discredits the testimony of the hotel servants without disproving the theory of suicide. It indicates that some one was present, either when the deed was committed or very shortly after; but it does not necessarily follow that the hand which placed the pistol in hers was guilty of her death. Now, however, we come to the greatest puzzle of all, and that is the presence of what our fat friend Duclos calls 'The Perfume of Madness' on that single sheet of note-paper. It is not evident on anything else about her, and yet, if it had been in contact with any of her belongings, they would be scented with it. I had the note in my hands perhaps five minutes altogether, and I have scrubbed them half a dozen times since; but I can't get entirely rid of it. Just get the gloves I wore last night, will you?"

I took them from the pocket of his overcoat, and the fragrance which came from them was strong enough to bring back the memory of Duclos' terror so vividly that I held them at arms' length; and Tommy smiled as he watched me.

"I don't believe that the perfume is strong enough to arouse your combative instinct," he said sarcastically. "The fact that my gloves retain it after absorbing it from my hands, which in turn took it from the note-paper, is eloquent proof that it is penetrating and lasting. That is a very significant fact, and one which, perhaps, reconciles the apparently contradictory evidence." His face was very Mephistophelean as he rose from his chair and nervously paced the room, and I realized that he was employing his customary maneuvers of "trying it on the dog"; in other words, piecing together a theory and expounding it that I might indicate possible weak spots by raising objections.

"Supposing that we admit that some one was present, either at the time of

or shortly after her death," he said. "For the sake of argument and to carry out more completely the 'Put-yourself-in-his-place' idea, we shall suppose that you are that person. You have an appointment with Madame De Sauvigny, perhaps to meet you for dinner. She does not keep it, and you go to the hotel to find the reason. On entering her apartment it is sufficiently apparent; madame is dead by her own hand. Now, what would you do?"

"In the classic language of our friend Clancy, I think I should beat it and make it twenty-three for mine," I answered, with a little shudder; for I did not care, even in imagination, for the rôle he had assigned to me.

"Precisely; but if you adopted ordinary precautions you would first assure yourself that there was nothing left to suggest murder in case you were unlucky enough to be stopped or questioned. Accept Le Garde's deduction that the reflex action from the wounding of the heart caused the pistol to be thrown a considerable distance from the body, and what would you do? Ignorant of the fact that that was the natural thing, you would probably replace it near the body, and, if you were artistic in your method, you would even place it in her hand. Finding the farewell note on the table, you feel doubly safe, but to assure yourself that your name is not mentioned in it, you examine it carefully, holding it in your hands until it is impregnated with the perfume which you personally affect, forgetting that that perfume is unique, and that you are leaving behind an unmistakable evidence of your visit. Finally you seize a favorable opportunity to escape as you have entered, unnoticed, and, secure in your belief, that the case will be regarded as a suicide, taking no extraordinary precautions to prevent discovery."

"Which permits you to track me down at your convenience," I said, grinning; and Tommy shook his head.

"My dear fellow, if guilty people would lead absolutely natural lives and not attempt to cover their tracks after committing crimes, nine-tenths of them would escape detection," he answered seriously. "I should far rather have any one I am after suspicious and fearful, for it usually leads to self-betrayal. Does my theory seem plausible to you?"

"If you admit that the hotel servants could have been eluded, it is as good as another," I answered; and he made a gesture of impatience.

"I attach slight importance to their statements, in any case," he said. "In the first place, they are negative; they only state what they did not see. In the second place, if the concierge admits the possibility of any one getting in or out without his knowledge, it would be a tacit admission of negligence; for he is provided with that window of observation that no one *may* pass in or out without his knowledge. I am not claiming that I have found a solution; but it isn't a bad hypothesis to work on, and now I'm off to the perfumer's—'that is to say, the Maison Poirrot'—to get the mysterious orchids. Poor Duclos is so impressed with the idea of their powerful influence for evil that there may be something in it. I'll bring 'em back here, and I wish that you would stay in on the chance that Le Garde may turn up."

Inaction was never pleasant when Tommy was engaged in one of his peculiar investigations; but I was forced to accept it, and to kill time I picked up the morning paper. I was so preoccupied that my reading must have been mechanical, for I found myself wading through a list of "among those present" at a gala performance of the opera the night before; but when my eye caught the name "Countess De Thonier," my interest was aroused. No mention had been made of a countess in Le Garde's description of the famous hunter and explorer the previous evening, and when, a moment later, the detective himself entered I eagerly pointed to the paragraph.

"Another woman in the case—yes, I know," he said, glancing at the paper. "It makes me all the more anxious to interview the missing gentleman; for this is the first that any one knew of there being a countess. It is a trifle pe-

culiar that she should appear on the scene for the first time just as her alleged husband has departed for an indefinite absence. That is the reason for my visit here this morning."

Tommy came in as he was speaking, a carefully sealed packet in his hand, and he listened attentively to Le Garde's news.

"The lady is the latest Parisian sensation," he continued. "No one has ever known that the Count De Thonier was a benedict until last night, when she made her first public appearance in society. She reserved a box at the opera in that name, and her appearance was so remarkable that she divided the attention of the audience with the performers, and, if anything, received the lion's share. Of course it was reported to me when I returned to the prefecture, and my men described her as a beauty, and Oriental in the splendor of her costume and jewels. She was unescorted, and no one in the audience seemed to be acquainted with her; but it was not for lack of inclination on the part of the gilded youth who stared persistently at her box all the evening."

"And received no encouragement?" asked Tommy.

"Not the slightest, and they were overawed by a gigantic negro who acted as footman when she left the opera," answered Le Garde, smiling. "The man stood at the door of her box during the performance, and from the description I received of him he seems to be a combination of body-guard and servant. In default of being able to question the count concerning the case in which we are interested, I am on my way to investigate the person whom your countrymen would gallantly call his better half, and I thought that it might interest you to accompany me."

"Does your position confer authority to demand an interview?" asked Tommy; and Le Garde smiled confidently.

"I hardly know the limits of my authority, for I have never reached them; but this is, I believe, rather a matter for diplomacy," he answered. "In any case, it will be interesting to visit the Hôtel De Thonier, which is one of the few remaining town houses of the great nobles of the old order. It is on a small street off the Rue du Bac, only a stone's throw from here."

Five minutes later Tommy gave an exclamation of surprise when Le Garde stopped in front of a great doorway and raised an old-fashioned knocker, for the building to which it belonged had anything but the appearance of a private residence. It was three stories high with a crenelated cornice above the eaves, and, with the exception of a few small barred apertures in the third story, not a window opened upon the street. The first story presented only blank wall, the second a dozen niches which had apparently once been occupied by statuary; but the arched doorway before which we stood, the keystone bearing an elaborate but defaced armorial escutcheon, was the only possible means of entrance. This was closed by two massive, bolt-studded doors, one of them having a small wicket or postern-door let into it, a grille permitting the concierge to inspect would-be visitors before opening either.

"I've passed this place a dozen times, but always thought it was a public institution of some sort!" exclaimed Tommy, looking up at the defaced escutcheon.

"And it is only the fact that it was used for one, being a temporary prison during the Terror, which preserved it from destruction," answered Le Garde. "It was built about three hundred years ago, when the nobles kept small armies of retainers and depended upon their followers and the security of their houses for protection against the rabble. Its construction makes it impregnable to anything but artillery, and I confess that I am glad of an opportunity to see the inside of it."

The shutter behind the grille was opened, and the result of the inspection being favorable, the wicket was thrown open. A huge Swiss in a heavily gold-braided livery received us, and Le Garde handed him our cards, requesting that they be taken to the Count De Thonier.

"But the count is away from Paris,

gentlemen," answered the concierge. "Since four days he has departed for Africa."

"To madame, then, if you please," answered Le Garde, stepping through the wicket as if he were sure of being received; but after we had followed him the concierge closed the wicket and glanced at our cards uncertainly.

"The gentlemen have the honor of madame's acquaintance?" he said hesitatingly; but a look at Le Garde's face which had become set and stern banished hesitation, and he left us, carrying the cards on a server and grumbling to himself. We were in a long tunnellike passage which led through the building to an inner courtyard, glass doors on either side of it showing wide staircases with massive balustrades leading from great vestibules, which had previously been guard-rooms, to the second story. Le Garde smiled as he looked about, his keen eyes noting every detail.

"Fill those anterooms with beruffled and ruffling swordsmen, and we should be back in the reign of Louis XIV.," he said. "Feudalism passes but romance remains ever, and I wonder——" He paused, and, turning from our examination of the staircase, the reason was apparent; for before us stood one of the biggest and blackest negroes I had ever seen. He was as black as ebony and his head was covered with the kinky wool which stamped him as an Ethiopian, in spite of the entire absence of negroid characteristics from his features. He was dressed in a livery which was very like zouave uniform, and wore a fez, while in his hand was the server with our cards.

"Monsieur Le Garde?" he said interrogatively, glancing from one to the other, and Le Garde bowed. "You will pardon me, sir, that I come in response to the cards sent to madame," he said in perfect French. "In the absence of the Count De Thonier, madame receives no one; but I shall be pleased to convey any message which may be necessary."

Le Garde had listened attentively, his keen eyes taking in every detail of the negro's person and costume while he was speaking; and when he finished he drew a package of blank forms from his pocket.

"You will please to present my compliments to madame, and ask her to fill out this form in her own handwriting," he said, looking sharply at the negro, as he selected one from the bundle. "As a foreigner, madame is undoubtedly ignorant that certain papers are required by the minister of police, and the count neglected to file them before leaving." The negro took the paper and started to carry out the order, but Le Garde called him back. "There is one for you to fill out, also; for neither your name nor occupation is entered at the prefecture."

"I am Zafir, valet-de-chambre to Madame La Comtesse De Thonier," he answered pompously. "If you gentlemen will give yourselves the pain to be seated, I shall ask madame to fill out the blank, and will do the same with mine."

He opened the door of the luxuriously furnished anteroom, but Le Garde held back.

"As it is a formality which will require some time, we should prefer to wait in the garden," he said curtly, and before the negro could consent or object, he led the way across the stone-flagged court to another tunnellike passage through the building, and we found ourselves in an extensive and beautiful old-world garden, surrounded on three sides by a high and massive stone wall, the fourth bounded by the southern façade of the house.

It was a strange spot to find in the heart of old Paris, a reminder of the days before the Revolution when the great nobles arrogated to themselves all of the good things of life and lived in a splendor which rivaled the Court of Versailles itself. If the part of the house which faced on the street and was exposed to the vulgar gaze was fortresslike and forbidding, it was compensated for by the beauty of the southern façade, which was reserved for the eyes of the owner and his friends. Carved marble balconies, exquisite statuary, and bas-reliefs were lavished on

it; and in the garden itself, filled with rare trees and shrubs and with rich turf which had been undisturbed for centuries, there were a half-dozen kiosks and summer-houses of quaint design and exquisite workmanship.

"The garden was said to rival those of the Petite Trianon," remarked Le Garde absently as we walked through the shaded, trim-bordered paths; but I realized that his eyes were noting the architectural, rather than the horticultural, features. "A Count De Thonier was a favorite of Louis XIV. and possessed tremendous estates and vast wealth; but, of course, the Revolution seriously curtailed the family fortunes. Enough was left, however, to make the present representative of the family a rich man, and it is curious that with such a beautiful home he should voluntarily exile himself so much of the time. These glass houses seem a new and incongruous addition."

A series of broad high greenhouses of decidedly modern construction near the middle of the garden did, indeed, seem out of place in this remnant of feudal France in which ghosts of Watteau shepherdesses and courtiers in silks and laces might walk; but Tommy apparently regarded them as more interesting than anything he had seen, for he hurried toward the half-open door.

From in front of it, startled by his quick footsteps on the path, rose an even more incongruous figure, a turbaned, swarthy man wrapped in a long cloak of white camel's hair cloth; and Tommy stopped in surprise as he extended a long brown arm in front of the door. He spoke a few words in a strange language, and seeing that his words were unintelligible, barred the doorway with his body, and gave a shrill whistle. Another man, a French gardener in cap and blouse and with a particularly unprepossessing face, ran toward us from a flower-bed where he had been at work and excitedly explained that we could not enter.

"It is the fumigation against the insect pest, gentlemen," he said. "The fumes of a gas most deadly to man which we use to exterminate the parasite which destroys the rare orchids which my master has brought back from his travels. For many days it is impossible for any one to enter the greenhouses."

"I should suggest a danger sign, instead of this unintelligible idiot, then," said Tommy irritably as he craned his neck to get a glimpse of the interior. The man was watching every movement attentively, and his tremendous turban seemed always to be in the way of his vision, and Tommy turned away with a gesture of impatience.

"Perhaps another day, sir," volunteered the gardener uneasily. "Believe me, sir, it would be death to enter there now." And, watching the guardian of the door, I made up my mind from the way his hand was fumbling under his cloak that it would mean a fight, at least, if any attempt were made to brush past him.

Le Garde gave the gardener a tip which was accepted gratefully, and suggested that we return to the house.

Tommy glanced at him significantly. "I am studying orchids, you know," he said quietly; but when we were out of ear-shot of the gardener he turned to Le Garde in triumph. "Your fat friend who considers himself the incarnation of the Maison Poirrot asserted that the dried specimens of his famous orchid are the only ones in France!" he exclaimed. "There is a glaring evidence of the fallibility of human testimony, for in that greenhouse I saw suspended from the roof a basket with a large cluster of the fresh blooms."

"Which perhaps explains the deadly fumes which infest the house," replied Le Garde tranquilly. "I believe, however, that the object of our visit is attained, for I see Zafir awaiting us with the papers."

Le Garde hastily thrust them into his pocket, and the Swiss, with suspicious alacrity, held open the wicket for us to pass out. A knife-grinder on the opposite side of the street looked up curiously from his work, and I saw an almost imperceptible signal from Le Garde's hand, which was unacknowledged as he again bent over his grind-

stone; but while we were getting into our fiacre I caught a glimpse of his face, and recognized our quondam friend the cabman!

Ten minutes later we were in Le Garde's office at the prefecture; and, seating himself at his desk, he examined the blanks which the negro had given to him.

"Here is a complete history, so far as the police regulations require it, of the Countess De Thonier," he said. "The lady's origin is a peculiar one for the wife of a member of one of our oldest families; but, after all, that is not the most surprising thing about the document."

He passed it over to Tommy, and smiled as he saw that he disregarded the writing and held the paper to his nose.

"No," he said gravely; "for it does not require the expert knowledge of the Maison Poirrot to recognize in the scent which this paper has absorbed, the perfume of madness!"

IV.

Le Garde and Tommy looked at each other for several minutes without speaking, the telltale document on the desk between them, before Le Garde picked it up and glanced over its contents.

"Significant as it may prove to be, the perfume is not the only point of interest about this document," he said. "For one thing, it offers the explanation for the Countess De Thonier's swarthy skin and the taste for barbaric splendor in her attire. She gives her birthplace as Rangoon; her father's name as Richard Abercrombie, and that of her mother as Talasinjhi. She is evidently the offspring of one of those mixed and irregular marriages which are so common in the far East, and inherits both from a native mother.

"And no mongrel—equine, canine, or human—should be allowed to exist," grumbled Tommy, voicing the American contempt for the half-caste. "Taking into consideration the fact that the rare variety of orchid from which this perfume is distilled is growing in the Count de Thonier's greenhouse, and that the perfume itself is used by the countess, it is fair to assume that she is worthy of closer investigation. Is it possible to demand an interview with her?"

"Possible, but hardly advisable, I should say," answered Le Garde cautiously. "I can assure you that no member of that household will leave Paris, for they are all under close observation, and anything in the nature of attempted flight will be followed by immediate arrest. And now, my dear sir, we should have the report of the autopsy on the body of Madame De Sauvigny." And he touched the bell on his desk.

The man who answered that summons briefly summarized the official and detailed report which he handed over, the only point of interest being the fact that measurements had demonstrated that the left arm was slightly more developed than the right, which supported Tommy's deduction that she was left-handed.

"And the coiffure?" asked Le Garde, when he paused.

The officer placed on the desk a paper containing dozens of hairpins, and four or five of those unattractive wads of hair, which are generally called "rats," which women employ in the mysteries of hair-dressing.

"Elaborate, but not unusual. The hair was all her own, and, according to orders, I have brought away these articles, which were all that were found," reported the officer laconically.

Le Garde examined them closely, pinching and bending each of the "rats" between his fingers; and we watched him attentively when he slit one of them open with his knife and drew from it a small glass flask of curious workmanship. He gave a little exclamation of triumph as he held it up, the light from the window behind him making it glow like a coal of fire.

"Perhaps we have here the explanation of madame's strange request!" he exclaimed; and Tommy eagerly extended his hand.

"But, for that same request, it is not probable that her secret would have been discovered," he said, as he turned the flask over in his fingers. "I should hardly be surprised to have a geni escape from this when the seal is broken —it looks uncanny enough!"

The vial was sealed with red sealing-wax, an impression in curious hieroglyphics sharply defined on it; and Le Garde quickly took an impression of the seal in soft wax.

"We shall soon know," he answered grimly, as he opened it.

Instantly the great office was permeated by a scent of cloying sweetness, so powerful that it was sickening, and he hastily opened the windows. I half-expected to find the red veil which Duclos has so dramatically described before my eyes; but, on the contrary, the perfume seemed to have such a relaxing effect, morally and physically, that I felt no desire to assault any one, and would not have turned over my hand to insure the detection and punishment of the suspected murderer.

"If I were selecting a name for this, I should call it the 'Perfume of Satiety'!" exclaimed Tommy, fanning himself vigorously with his hat.

Le Garde, holding his handkerchief closely over his mouth and nose, devoted himself to the examination of the flask. It contained no liquid, but when he turned it over and shook it, a tightly rolled slip of thin parchment fell out on the desk. Disregarding the almost overpowering perfume which came from it, both he and Tommy bent their heads over it; but they soon gave over their examination, and looked at each other in disappointment.

"Sanscrit—a cipher—what the deuce is it?" said Tommy; and Le Garde shook his head.

"It is, at any rate, of sufficient importance for expert investigation, and we should soon know its meaning," he said, as he jotted down a series of names on paper. When he had finished he handed the parchment to the officer, and directed him to have it photographed, and to send a copy to each of the men on his list. "From one of that half-dozen, which includes the greatest linguists in France, we should have a translation of those hieroglyphics before evening," he said confidently. "Now, one other point. I have ordered the arrest, the moment he appears on the street, of the French gardener who spoke to us in the garden to-day. He is an ex-convict, and has twice been through my hands."

"Do you recall the nature of his offenses?" asked Tommy quickly; and Le Garde turned up the card-catalogue on his desk.

"Burglary, in both cases; the second attended by aggravated assault on the owner of the house, who interrupted him as he was forcing an escritoire," he answered.

"Mr. Le Garde, for the establishment of a French gentleman, I should say that the Hôtel De Thonier was peculiar," said Tommy, with raised eyebrows. "A half-caste countess, an Ethiopian valet-de-chambre, a criminal gardener, and a turbaned individual, who may be the devil himself, from his unsavory appearance, are in evidence so far; and there is no telling what might be discovered if the entire place were ransacked."

"It is a search which I should like personally to supervise, and perhaps I shall have that privilege," answered Le Garde, smiling. "The name of the count is the first which we discover in our investigation; he is unfortunately inaccessible; but much that belongs to him is in Paris."

"Is there a good photograph of him available?" asked Tommy.

Le Garde produced three cabinets from his desk. "Full face, three-quarter, and profile; almost the requirements of the Bertillon system," he explained, as Tommy examined them.

"These are good likenesses?" Tommy said interrogatively.

Le Garde nodded. "Excellent; the count takes a good photograph."

I knew from Tommy's expression that in them he had found a new puzzle. "Is there any objection to my endeavoring to secure interviews with the mem-

bers of that semi-Oriental and altogether mysterious household?" he asked.

"Not the slightest, now that it is under observation," answered Le Garde. "May I ask if you have any definite suspicions which you wish to verify?"

"No—nothing definite," answered Tommy slowly. "Not even formulated enough to be expressed in words; but I have an idea that you share my belief that the explanation of the death of Madame De Sauvigny will be found in the Hôtel De Thonier."

"Or from the lips of its owner, when his ship reaches port," answered Le Garde; and Tommy smiled.

"Many opportunities have been lost through waiting 'until the ship comes in,' and I am too impatient," he said, as Le Garde turned to the other papers on his desk and we rose to go.

"But it is a virtue which it is well to cultivate—when a woman is to be studied," answered Le Garde; and Tommy shrugged his shoulders.

"As I have told you, I do not find them a profitable study," he answered, with an assumption of indifference which did not deceive me; and when we reached the street his lips were set in lines which told me that he meant business.

"That medieval relic is too interesting to remain unexplored until any ship gets in," he said, with a grin. "I don't know just how to do it, but your Uncle Thomas is going to get over the garden wall, if there is no easier method of gaining admittance."

"You might try hypnotism on that fat-headed concierge," I suggested, and he looked at me curiously.

"Altogether, we met four people in that establishment this morning," he said thoughtfully. "The Swiss concierge was evidently, as you imply, a fat-headed fool; the others, unless I am very much mistaken, were crooks. Just piece that in with what we already know; that a mystery surrounds the death of a woman whose name is mixed up with that of the owner of the house; that the mysterious 'Perfume of Madness' is used by a woman, who suddenly appears as his wife, and that the owner himself is absolutely invisible; and—where does it lead us?"

"I think that it would lead to insomnia, if I were forced to read the riddle," I answered.

"Possibly, unless we find another crime which is quite as serious as the one we already suspect," he continued. "I take it for granted that Le Garde has assured himself that the Count De Thonier actually sailed on that ship. Unless he has, I should say that the chances were equally good that, dead or alive, he is concealed in that old rabbit warren."

"And what leads you to suspect such an absurd thing?" I asked incredulously; and Tommy laughed.

"Perhaps intuition; perhaps it is the effect of the 'Perfume of Madness,' but it is not absurd. A man of the world, which we can safely assume De Thonier to be, does not leave for a prolonged absence with the possibilities for such a general mix-up on hand. I think it far more probable that he had been quietly done away with, or that he is locked up in some cellar of that old place, which could probably tell stranger stories if bricks and mortar had tongues. I would give a good deal to interview that white nigger."

"White nigger!" I exclaimed. "Tommy, the traditional ace of spades was never blacker than Zafir."

"And at any one of Tony's establishments in New York you can have tan shoes dyed black while you wait," answered Tommy quietly. "Perhaps the same preparation was used on that delegate's face; for that is no more his natural color than the minstrel-wig on his head is his natural wool. The man is Caucasian or Aryan; a fact which Le Garde, who is an adept in disguise, probably recognized as readily as I did."

I laughed outright at the absurdity of the thing, but Tommy was in earnest.

"I tell you that I am right," he continued impatiently. "He stained his skin perfectly, but he made no attempt to disguise his features; and you never saw a man with a single drop of Ethiopian blood in his veins with finger-nail crescents and sclerotics like his. There

is a strong indication of crookedness, for honest men do not assume disguises —always excepting our friends of the police. Add to him the gardener with a criminal record, and that scarecrow who was quite ready to knife me if I tried to enter the greenhouse, and you have a combination which looks like trouble."

"And the mysterious, dusky, and beautiful countess?" I suggested doubtfully.

"Confound her—her sex makes her puzzling enough without adding mixed blood to it!" he exclaimed irritably. "I'll wager that we'll find her the principal cause of the trouble. Great Scott —look at that!"

We were approaching our own door, and his exclamation was caused by the sight of a well-turned out brougham before it, from the box of which Zafir descended, and carried a card to the concierge. He was coming back to the carriage when we arrived, and, seeing us, announced grandiloquently that "Madame la Comtesse De Thonier desired an interview with Monsieur Williams."

Perhaps Le Garde's description had prepared us to expect something bizarre; and, in spite of the absolutely modish cut and material of madame's costume, our expectations were realized. Its many colors were vivid, but, strange to say, they did not clash, and they seemed to harmonize perfectly with her clear skin, which was the color of old ivory, and her large eyes, as black and mysterious as night. Her lips were a vivid scarlet, full and sensual in form; her nose long and straight, with thin, delicate nostrils; and the outline of her face a perfect oval.

Neither Tommy nor I was an expert in the details of woman's attire; but even the least observing of masculine eyes would have noted that her dress was of the latest fashion, and the design the work of an artist.

In spite of the restrictions imposed upon her by the conventions of Western modes, her movements were of the East; the graceful, well-poised walk of the woman whose feet have not been cramped by shoe-leather, and whose waist has not known the curse of corsets. As she moved about the great studio, reveling with the frank admiration of a child in its beauty, it was with the lithe grace of a panther; and, disdaining the chair which Tommy offered, she threw herself, half-reclining, on a large divan.

"This place is so—what shall I call it, cosmopolitan?—in its atmosphere that I feel I can be myself," she said in perfect English, and with a smile which disclosed the prettiest teeth imaginable. "I suppose that in coming here I violate all of the conventions, and that you are curious to know what leads me to do it?"

There was a note of interrogation in her voice, and Tommy was quick to assure her of her welcome.

"Had you described the place as 'Bohemian,' I should have regretfully concluded that you were a Philistine, and have been suspicious that your motive was idle curiosity," he answered; and she smiled again in quick understanding.

"My curiosity is, at any rate, not an idle one, and Bohemia and dirt are too closely associated in my mind to make the mythical land attractive," she answered. "Mr. Williams, you are an American, or I should not be here at all —now can you guess why I come?"

"Guessing is only a figure of speech with us, you know, countess, and, as a matter of fact, I am a poor hand at solving riddles," he replied; and her eyebrows arched prettily as she looked at him.

"In that statement I doubt if you are entirely truthful, but I shall tell you," she said, half in earnest, half in banter. "In the first place, it is—because I am a woman!"

"The cap to that is so obvious that I shall refrain from uttering it," he said, looking at her in unfeigned admiration; and the ivory skin was tinged with a trace of color when she laughed.

"Which shows that you know little of my sex, or you would lose no opportunity to say a pretty thing," she said, smiling in challenge.

Tommy shook his head ruefully. "It's one of the regrets of my life that my education in so charming a subject has been neglected," he acknowledged; and she clapped two tiny hands together approvingly.

"You are, at least, an apt pupil, then!" she exclaimed. "Just a little lesson, then, in advance payment for the information you will presently give to me: Unless you are speaking from a lecture-platform, don't generalize."

"If I might always have so charming an inspiration, I should know by intuition," he answered gallantly; and I opened my eyes in astonishment, wondering if this could be the same Tommy who, ten minutes before, had expressed anything but flattering opinions of the sex in general, and this specimen of it in particular.

"I imagine that you would soon become proficient, even with a lay-figure; but I have not come to educate you," she answered; and without giving him opportunity to reply she went on quickly: "Mr. Williams, I told you that I came, first, because I was a woman. That implies that I am curious, and I wish to know why you and your friend called at the Hôtel De Thonier this morning in the company of the director of the secret police?"

"It was entirely upon his invitation; he called here to see me about another matter, and thought that the visit might interest us," answered Tommy.

She looked at him sharply. "In some things you are reticent—I wonder if you would respect my confidence?" she said slowly; and Tommy shook his head in emphatic protest.

"Madame De Thonier, you hardly know me," he answered quickly. "Confidences are always dangerous, and I avoid receiving them—unless I feel that I am justified in forcing them."

"But I have half a mind to force mine upon you," she answered quietly. "I am in trouble—very serious trouble, Mr. Williams. I need a friend; I need advice, and perhaps assistance."

Tommy was decidedly uncomfortable, and I was malicious enough to indulge in a little secret gloating at his expense. Nothing would have pleased him better than to have run this woman into a corner, and to have pitted his wits against hers to obtain information which she might wish to hide; but to have her come voluntarily, and try to force it on him as a privileged communication, ignorant of the fact that he was leagued with those who were watching her, placed him in a false position, and his chivalry forced him to protect her against herself.

"Please do not say another word, madame!" he protested vehemently. "I am a stranger to you, and the proper confidant of a young and, I judge, inexperienced married woman is her husband. Surely in his absence you have friends to whom you may turn in emergency—relatives—the British ambassador——"

"Oh, la, la—or the man in the moon!" she interrupted impatiently. "Don't talk nonsense. I am no longer a British subject; and, in any case, a Burmese half-caste would receive scant attention from his majesty's representative," she continued bitterly.

"But a beautiful woman would always be sure of a hearing from him," suggested Tommy; and she straightened up and stamped a pretty foot on the thick rug.

"Any woman who is not positively hideous can obtain masculine sympathy—at a price!" she exclaimed. "It is one which I am not prepared to pay. My English relations would refuse to own me, and my maternal relatives recognize but one method of solving such questions as are puzzling me, even if they could understand them. In my perplexity I turn to you, an American gentleman, for it is obviously impossible to confide in a husband who has disappeared as completely as if the earth had opened and swallowed him."

"But, my dear madame, you can communicate with him by cable within three weeks!" exclaimed Tommy; and she laughed scornfully.

"Do you believe the tale of his sailing for Africa?" she asked; and Tommy gave a sigh of relief as he shook his head.

"To be frank with you, I had my doubts," he answered; and she nodded.

"A man does not walk out of the house in evening dress, promising to return in an hour, and set off for the uttermost parts of the earth, leaving his bride of a day behind him," she said bitterly. "Mr. Williams, that is the way my husband disappeared. Four days ago we were married in London at nine in the morning. When we arrived in Paris we went directly to the Hôtel De Thonier, and, after dressing for dinner, I came to the drawing-room, only to receive a message expressing his regret that he had been called away, but would return within an hour. At the end of that time I received this note from him."

She took a letter from her reticule and read it aloud, translating it into English.

MY DARLING: Forgive me and trust me. I can explain nothing now; except that I am called away by a power which I dare not disobey. How long our separation will be I cannot say; but I beg of you to keep our marriage secret, to remain quietly within the Hôtel De Thonier, and to be patient until I can return to you and explain all. It will be announced that I have departed for Africa on a hunting-expedition, which will save you from intrusion. The bearer, Zafir, is my old and trusted servant. He will act as valet-de-chambre and accompany you if you insist upon going out. Do not question him—he knows nothing, and my word is his law.

When she had finished Tommy took the note from her, almost rudely in his eagerness, and, after glancing through it, held it to his face.

"Madame, you use a delicious and very unusual perfume!" he exclaimed, in seeming irrelevance; and she made a gesture of impatience.

"I do not—I hate all perfumes!" she said irritably. "The count's desk and paper is redolent of those beastly orchids, which I disliked particularly, even in Burma."

For a moment Tommy looked at her in astonishment, and then placed the note carefully in his pocket, and seated himself in a chair facing her.

"Madame De Thonier, I have not the slightest idea of what led you to come to me," he said quietly. "Perhaps it is of no consequence, but I can't receive your confidence under false pretense, It may or may not be in my power to help you; but one thing you must clearly understand. If I am to be of the slightest assistance to you, you must tell me everything, absolutely without reservation."

"Is it entirely chivalrous to exact conditions of a woman before offering aid?" she asked appealingly.

"It is not a question of chivalry," he answered impatiently. "I am willing to be equally frank with you, and to tell you that before you honored me with this visit I was interested in a matter which would have led to the investigation of the Count De Thonier's disappearance. That investigation will, in any event, go on; it only remains for you to decide whether you will further it by giving me your unreserved confidence, or make it more difficult by withholding something which may furnish the key to the entire mystery. You can hardly call it imposing conditions, for I ask only what is entirely reasonable and proper."

"And I will follow my first intuition, and trust you, absolutely and unreservedly," she said, after looking at him for a moment in silence. "I must impose upon your patience, gentlemen, for it practically involves the history of my life."

"One moment, madame," interrupted Tommy. "Does Zafir understand English?"

"No, I think not—I am not sure—why?" she asked; and with a grim smile on his face Tommy tiptoed to the door, and opened it suddenly.

The negro pitched forward into the room, and Tommy unceremoniously threw him out again, and commanded him to go below and wait with the carriage.

"That's why," he said quietly, when he resumed his seat. "Now, madame, we are entirely at your disposition."

TO BE CONTINUED.

Before the Altar of Quan Tai

By Charles Kroth Moser,

Author of "Brothers of the Blood," "The Po Taut Tsi," Etc.

The dramatic outcome of a practical joke inspired by rum and a desire to have a little fun in a Chinese temple. How a couple of white men dropped back a thousand years in a night

GOSH! er great idea!" said Wanzell to me. "Wan'er hav' shome fun?"

"Yes," I replied, as steadily as I might, while I watched with amazement the lamp-post stagger away from my friendly embraces. You see, we had been—er—dining! With Marquandt, and he's—er—well, hard-headed as a post. Like all those journalists. "Wash'er game?" I asked Wanzell, attempting to resume amicable relations with the lamp-post again. It was quite late; after midnight I should think.

"Le'sh go up Chinatown; see er temple! Shay our prayers to er heathen gods, eh? Bully idea, eh, Billy? Shay good-nigh' prayers to chunk er shtone. Ha! ha! Chinatown great, anyhow. Great color. Great atmosphere. An' feeling, man, *feeling!* Lotsh of it. Jush zhackly what we painters need. Feeling—thash it. Chinatown's got lotsh of it. We c'n get inshp'rashun f'r my new pic'shure. You get shome sketches, ole man; good black-'n'-whitsh study, eh? Great idea, eh, Billy? Come on!"

Arm in arm we sought the trail for Chinatown, and after some difficulty found it. The sidewalks seemed very narrow in that part of town, somehow, and we presently took to the center of the street—or as near to the center as we could keep. As we began to ascend the Dupont Street hill into the quarter the gas-lamps seemed to thin out, to grow very far apart, and to send but dim and wobbling rays through the almost Stygian blackness of the night. There were but few people walking about, and most of these Chinese, who seemed not to walk at all, but only to glide, noiselessly, and like evil wraiths, out of the darkness in front of us, to disappear into the darkness behind us without so much as a glance from their opaque, jet eyes.

At California Street a policeman was standing under an arc-light, with the electric rays drenching him. Wanzell swore he saw three stars shining on the copper's breast, but I couldn't see but two. Somehow, when we got right up to him, I couldn't see but one.

"Better go home, boys," said the policeman to us. "Ain't it 'bout time for decent young gents to be in bed?"

"Aw, go home y'self!" retorted Wanzell. "Who wansh t' go t' bed thish time night? Cansh ya' let a man shay hish prayers firsh? Come on, Billy! You fol' me."

The wind was howling around the corners and under the eaves of the old rookeries by the time we were well into the quarter; and the air was so thick with dead smells and punk smoke you could cut it with a slate-pencil. There wasn't a white face to be seen in the streets, but occasionally Chinks came slipping by on their soft-padded feet like night-prowling cats. Once in a while you could hear the dreary twanging of a samisen from some basement, or the harsher, high-pitched wail of a two-stringed fiddle. It was black as Tophet

all around, except where the big, orange-colored lanterns, made of fish-bladders and wax candles, gleamed like yellow pumpkins in front of some slave den—and then you could hear those poor little painted lilies whining through their noses from behind the tiny iron wicket windows above the sidewalk.

It was all so weird and cold and evil-smelling that it got on my nerves, and I made Wanzell stop on a corner at an old gin-joint to see if I couldn't get a drink.

When we went in, a weazel-eyed old Chink, with pock-marks all over his face, took a long look at us, and then went on playing pi-gow with himself at a little ebony table. There were gin-bottles all around, and black, fat-bellied earthen flasks of liqueurs standing in rows on the shelves. I pointed with my finger to the bottles.

"Drink, John; drink!" I said. "We want gin!"

He looked at me as though he thought he saw a horn growing out between my eyes.

"Me no sabe," he replied.

"Aw, rats!" said Wanzell, clutching a bamboo screen to keep it from falling. "You sabe gin, John. We likee catchee booze. Two time, sabe?"

"No. No sabe. Thlis not boozee joint. Him dlug-stlo'. Sabe? Sellee medl'cine."

We couldn't persuade him, so we had to get out. But before we left I caught the pungent, burned-peanut smell of opium, and a thin wisp of white smoke came through a crack in the rear wall, and we knew what a liar the old Chink was. Besides, the rancid, thick smell of the smoke made my stomach feel funny—and I didn't want a drink, anyhow, after that!

Wanzell, who knew his Chinatown better than I—for a painter finds more material there than a worker in black-and-white—led the way to the old temple in Shun Ping Alley. It was a hideous old building, ramshackle and sun-blistered, made of wood, and the wind moaned through its tattered shingles. Its boards creaked; they had crackled, turned up at the ends, and torn out the nails when the frosts bit it. A broken fence crazily staggered around the temple—which had seen better days in those early years when the city was new—and both Wanzell and I leaned much of our weight upon it to keep it from falling as we neared the great, rotten-beamed veranda.

Not a glimmer of light beamed from the temple as we stood in front of it. Not a whisper of sound. It stood grim, black, silent as the tomb—a darker blur in the dark night. A trickle of chill ran down my spine as I stood looking, and I half-turned—half-expecting to see a soft-padded night-prowler ready to pounce upon me. There was nothing—save that I felt that the effects of my—dining—were beginning to wear off.

"Le's cut it out," I suggested to Wanzell.

"Not on y'r life," he said emphatically. "Whash smatter? Got col' feet? Aw, come on. You fol' y'r uncle. Wash'er bet I don' pull er ole joss' nose, eh? Dinners? All ri'; thash go. Come on."

The prospect of seeing little, fat, stubby, flaxen-haired Wanzell pull the stone god's nose was too alluring for me. We assisted each other to the heavy doors; they were closed tightly but not locked; and my companion kicked them open without ceremony. The hall was dark as a dungeon inside. At first there was no sound, but soon the faint scamper of little feet across the floor told me that we were invading the domain of rodents, and—other things, perhaps!

Our feet struck the projecting corner of a stairway together, and together we piled up on the floor. When we could locate the hand-railing, we got to our feet and ascended the stairs. On the next floor they turned, and we saw a feeble light, far above us, struggling with the dust-grimed walls.

The stairs and the cold halls resounded sullen and jeering with the echoes of our footfalls; a sense of heaviness fell down over me, and the feeling that I had—to go no farther—was more than a wish. Wanzell, however, only

nurmured: "Come on, ole man; you wa'sh my shmoke."

As we neared the top landing a figure drifted out of the mellow gloom, and seemed to float, gentle and silent as the thin, light rays, down to meet us. It developed, as it came near, into a lean, rancid-flavored Chinese, with a gray cue wrapped around its throat; its face was a ghastly yellow, greasy and immobile, like an image carven in soapstone; and almost in the center of that uncanny face glowed a single, baleful eye—green, glittering, soulless as a piece of polished jade. The arched brow above that eye bent like a bow as we passed, and shot one shaft of green light, bitter and barbed, through my brain.

I shrank back, shuddered and tingled at its nameless, cold sting. The man passed on without a sound, and I felt as if I had been drenched with ice-water . . . Black doors, carved and ponderous, were before us. Wanzell flung himself upon them and tore them open.

We were in the temple. Quan Tai, the great deity of war, sat on his throne above the smoking shrine at the far end of the chamber. Friezes of hand-carved sandalwood, gilded, filled with tiny holes and angles, to obstruct the passage of devil-spirits, hung rigid from the ceiling. Each represented a scene from the life of the great Buddha. To our right stood the immense stone dragon, in whose belly the faithful burn their prayers of red paper; in his mouth rolled the basalt sphere representing the moon, which the dragon is supposed to swallow. An old scribe, keeper of the joss, sat at a little table on the left. He was writing bits from the sacred verse on tables of rice-paper as we entered. He looked up through his great horn-rimmed goggles at us, then came forward with bits of sandalwood and punk in his hands; he wanted us to buy them.

"Gwan, ole owl!" scorned Wanzell, giving him a push with his elbow. "We wan' er shay er prayers. Whash'er butt in for? T' get er soak on er nose, huh?" He smiled idiotically, and, clutching my arm, dragged me with him. "Come 'long, Billy. Thash 'er ole bum guy over there."

The keeper of the joss went back to his sacred books without a word. For the first time I noticed three other Chinese sitting on mats before a smaller shrine. They seemed to have been playing with little black blocks, but now they sat silent, motionless, their hands tucked away in their big sleeves. They did not look at us. I felt a queer chill slowly creep along my spine.

The chamber was half-lighted by huge, globular red lanterns. Urns and bowls filled with sacred oil, in which pieces of lighted punk were swimming, sat upon the altars. We passed between piles of food spread upon the shrines of lesser gods and the innumerable little paper deities of the Chinese. There were also vases filled with artificial flowers, burning punks, and smoking chunks of sandalwood. The temple was stuffed with all the weird rites of paganism.

At last we stood under the shadow of Quan Tai. The huge image, hideous, leering, a great sword in each of its hands, squatted like a monstrous beetle on its misshapen hams. Beside it stood its papier-mâché horse, bridled and saddled, ready for the war-god's battle charge. Armor hung near; halberds, pikes, javelins—ancient in design, but polished bright—stood around the walls. Everything was in readiness for Quan Tai to ride out to battle against his enemies. Seven brass lamps, burning frankincense and oil in their shallow cups, gave a grisly, blue-green light over the altar.

At the god's feet a barefoot heathen lay on his knees and elbows, casting the oblong, divining-sticks before the deity, praying and beseeching its favorable answer by the falling of the sticks.

Wanzell gave the prostrate man a kick, and took the divining-sticks away from him. The heathen sat up and rubbed his side with his hand. He made no sound; he seemed too astonished.

"Beat it!" Wanzell ordered the Chinese, in a thick voice. "Giv' er gshentl'-men er shance."

The worshiper stood up, looked at us inscrutably for a moment, and leaned his arms on the altar behind us. He seemed dazed.

Wanzell staggered up to the god and slapped him in a friendly manner on one thin shank.

"Hello, ole fel'! How's er comin'? Wan' er l'il——"

I caught hold of his arm. "For God's sake, Rex," I said. "Don't——"

"Huh? Whash er mazzer, eh? Got col' feet! Aw, get in er game. Come on—le'sh shay er prayers. Get down an' giv' 'im er kotow!"

Wanzell got to his knees very unsteadily, but I went down on mine firmly. The fumes of liquor were clearing from my brain, clearing surely, but Rex seemed more muddled than ever. I *had* to be game; but the wild, colored half-lights, the dead stillness, the barbaric odors, the strangely silent men in the far corner, and that dumb figure standing so quiet behind us—these gave me a feeling of suffocation, of dread, and I trembled on my knees. What might be the outcome of this mad prank—conceived and executed in intoxication? And I knew I had no power to abate the painter one jot from his purpose. Wanzell, like all artists, was both weak and stubborn—a child and a stone image. And I—I, though clearing, was not yet out of the snare-net of wine myself.

Wanzell knocked his head three times on the floor; I followed his example. Then he waved his hands foolishly in the air, muttered some incoherent gibberish, punctuating it with drunken laughs, and prostrated himself again.

"Lish'n, Billy," he leered at me. "Lish'n. Wa'sh me giv' 'em er razzl'-zoozl'." His head was swaying and his eyes were closed, but he began with *"Tu Jupiter in aeternum,"* and went on at the top of his voice with a long quotation from Cicero. Then he droned, in the high, nasal sing-song of the Chinese: *"Tai Ping ye lat po oo—oong chee!"*

It was all meaningless gibberish, but Wanzell smiled to himself with immense delight as he drooled off the stuff. Following the lead of his antics, I beat my head on the floor as often as he did, but I did not open my lips. The thing had become horrible to me, disgusting. His drooling died away, and his head rested in his hands; he lay prostrate on the floor.

After waiting some moments for his voice to begin the chant again, I raised up to have a look at him. He was lying there, still. All in the temple was still. In all the world there was not a breath of motion save only the thin smoke fumes curling up from the red ends of punks. Something made me catch my escaping breath and hold it. Away, as in a vast distance, I heard the low *blo-o-o-m!* of a temple-gong.

I turned my head, and caught the vanishing wraith of a smile on the Chinaman's face. God!—that smile!

I leaped to my feet. "Rex!" I shouted. "Rex! Get up! Let's get out of here!" My brain was as clear as ice.

Wanzell answered me with a stertorous snore. He was asleep. There was no other sound in the chamber, but I became aware that a door was opened, that a pale-green eye, cold as polished jade, was hurling shafts of malignity at the spot on my neck where the pulses throbbed. I sprang to Wanzell's shoulder, and shook him.

"Rex, wake up! For God's sake, man, wake up!" The echoes of my own voice rang hollow and mocking among the friezes around the ceiling.

I glanced around. The keeper of the joss still wrote verses in the sacred books. The three men on the mats still sat like figures of brass, their hands folded away in their sleeves. The newcomer's eye was fixed steadily on the ball in the stone dragon's mouth. The man behind me stared with unseeing eyes into space. Nothing moved or sounded.

I pitched Wanzell over on his back, and shouted: "Wake up! Wake up!"

His eyes rolled open, sightless at first—then seeing strange things! He sat up suddenly—looked about him—shivered. That ominous silence—who can tell how his inner self interpreted it? He looked up at me, his face ashen white, sobered.

"Billy . . . Billy! What is it?"

I did not answer, but stretched out my hand and helped him to his feet. He stooped to pick up his hat, and staggered but slightly; his tousled hair and his rumpled overcoat hanging dejectedly about him made him a wreck, like a dismantled ship. I took his hand, and found it cold.

"Let's get out of here," he said in a whisper—and, as if in belated reverence, took off his hat. We walked toward the doors.

Leisurely, yet with an indescribable glide that outdistanced us, all the Chinese in the room moved with us toward the doors. When we reached them they were standing an insouciant, idling group that barred the way. In the midst of them stood a tall old man in the flowing gown of the priesthood, a wisp of beard trickling from his chin.

Except for the sickening chill that had eaten into us, and was biting at our marrow, we might have plunged through that dawdling, insouciant bunch—scattered them like sheep. But I felt myself suddenly helpless, formless, a disembodied thing without force. I looked at Wanzell, and his mouth was working—but his short arms were limp at his side, and he could not do more than draw his breath in gasps. There was menace in those heathen—deadly menace. We felt it, *knew* it, but we could not see it. That was the awfulness of it.

I had only time to notice that the priest's finger-nails were inches long, clawlike, hooked, cruel as the talons of an eagle. Then his saturnine features cracked open.

"O masters!" he purred, in almost perfect English, "you, too, are worshipers in the temple of Buddha?"

Wanzell and I did not look at each other, yet I knew the blood rushed into his face. He was an artist—and stubborn; daring and impetuous. "Why 'n——" And then I knew the blood ebbed from his face, and left it a dry, dead mask, as mine was—for I caught a flash of something, a subtle something, one glimpse into the Seventh Circle of hell, in that priest's eyes.

"Yes," we murmured in one voice. Only the eyes of the priest smiled.

"But you know nothing of our ritual, O masters. You are novices; like little children. But I, the priest of Quan Tai, and these his children"—he indicated the Chinese with a sweep of his hand—"will teach it to you. You shall not forget. You wish to learn, O masters?"

To refuse! We never thought of it.

"Yes," we breathed. "Yes."

"Come." He led us before the altar of Quan Tai again—behind us flocked the five deadly silent men. "Kneel," he said, and together we knelt—reverently—before the graven image.

"Behold"—and the priest's voice rang with a note of zeal—"O masters, the great god Quan Tai, son of heaven and god, greater than all gods in the earth—whether of men white or yellow or brown or black! Is it not so, O masters?"

"Yes."

He addressed himself to us. "We have a prayer, O men of the white nation, which in our tongue is past thine understanding. But I will give it to thee in yours, and ye shall repeat it after me." He turned to the god: "O mighty and illustrious Quan Tai! We are dogs groveling at thy feet——" He stopped and waited; we were silent. "Repeat it," he said. It seemed to me my nostrils sniffed the odor of burning human flesh. In all the world there was no help for us. "We are dogs groveling at thy feet," I heard myself repeating; and I caught the sound of Wanzell's voice broken with agony. The odor of burning flesh grew stronger.

The priest repeated some more words, which I have never since remembered—for my brain was in a whirl. But I know that I said them after him. And still that horrid smell! . . . We prostrated ourselves, and knocked our head nine times—the sacred three times three—against the floor. I glanced up once—what was that hideous, one-eyed Chink doing with that lighted punk-stick? He was standing behind Wanzell; he held it in

his hands; its end was glowing, baleful, red—and a greasy spiral of smoke was rising up from it! The heathen's green jade eye glittered venomous as the red end of the punk-stick—across Wanzell's features I saw a spasm of agony. He was uttering no sound. What was the meaning of this?

"Kiss ye, now, the feet of Quan Tai, O masters, and acknowledge yourselves his slaves," droned the priest. This was too much. Angrily I started to my feet. I heard a groan beside me, and again that pungent, fetid odor. I saw Rex thrust out his drawn face toward the stone feet; his lips were pursed . . . I touched my own to a cold, flinty surface, and an indescribable shudder ran through me.

The priest motioned for us to stand up, and we obeyed. We were trembling. I felt faint, and staggered when I picked up my hat, which I had left on the floor. There was an ineffable smile beaming from the old priest's face; his words fell like honey from his lips.

"Now have ye worshiped truly, O masters. Now are ye set with the seal of mighty Quan Tai. Go ye now, my masters, in peace."

We felt ourselves gently shoved to the doors and outside. There was no resistance in us. We crept down the dark stairs alone. I took Wanzell's arm —I do not know why—and led him. He leaned heavily upon me, his breath coming and going in sharp, jerky gasps. The house resounded with our footfalls, cold, sullen, jeering; rats scampered over our insteps. There was no other sound, no light.

We felt fresh, sweet air; a rush of salt aroma from the bay, and stepped out into the street.

Wanzell reeled, fell against me, and sobbed:

"Oh, my God, Rutherford!" He flung up a pitying hand to the back of his neck. He was perfectly sober. I felt his dead weight in my arms before he screamed, "Help!"

I took Wanzell home and put him to bed, and it was three days before he left it. And he always wears a high collar to hide a small red scar that looks like an ugly burn on the back of his neck. That one-eyed man held the lighted punk against his skin all the time we were praying.

THE KINDNESS CURE

AN amusing story is told of a recently appointed lady supervisor of public schools in Pennsylvania. One day she happened to be visiting a school where a young incorrigible was undergoing punishment for a series of misdemeanors. The teacher cited him as the worst boy in the school—"One I can't do anything with. I've tried everything in the way of punishment."

"Have you tried kindness?" was the gentle inquiry of the supervisor.

"I did at first, but I've got beyond that now."

At the close of the lesson the lady asked the boy if he would like to call and see her on the following Saturday. A boy arrived promptly at the hour appointed. The hostess showed him her best pictures, played him her liveliest music, and set before him a delicious lunch, and then she thought it quite time to begin her little sermon.

"My dear," she began, "were you not very unhappy to stand before all the class for punishment?"

"Please, ma'am," broke in the boy, with his mouth full of cake, "it wasn't me you saw. It was Billy, and he gave me a dime to come and take your jawing!"

Music Hath Charms

By B. M. Bower

When the cowboy gets the music fever he gets it bad. In this case it takes the form of an alarm clock with a "popular ballad" attachment. The monstrosity provokes several different kinds of wrath in the sleeping quarters of the Happy Family

IRISH rose up from his bunk and glared. "Now, who in thunder wound up that darned monstrosity again?" he demanded irritably.

Pink turned his head and regarded him reproachfully. "When a man hasn't got any more ear for music than you have, Irish, he sure needs his ear cultivated. I've told yuh a-plenty, that *ain't* a monstrosity. It's a clock."

Irish swore, and called it other and worse names; and the little, glass-sided clock that Pink had seen in Dry Lake among the Christmas display at the store, had bought and carried home proudly in his arms, tinkled out "Sweet Adeline" with a cheery persistence that made one want to throw things and near maddened Irish, who had nerves.

Even Cal Emmett cast toward it a baleful glance. "I'm going to see the boss about that clock," he threatened. "Pink's got to keep it down in the calf-shed, or some place; maybe it would amuse the hospital bunch more'n it does us."

The clock drawled a last, faint "Sweet A-a-deli-i-ine," and was mercifully silent. "What the dickens ails you fellows?" Pink inquired sweetly. "That same clock cost me six cast-iron plunks, and she's sure worth the price. You're so blamed used to the kind that shakes its insides loose every time the alarm goes off, that you're plumb spoiled. Yuh simply can't appreciate a nice, pretty-behaved clock that don't dance around on one foot and come near breaking all the windows when it goes off, but just stands right still and plays a nice love-tune at yuh while you're waking up. I'm like Carnegie: I like to come back to earth to sweet strains uh music. I wouldn't trade that clock for the best saddle-horse on the place."

"No, by golly, I guess yuh wouldn't!" fleered Slim ponderously. "Yuh couldn't trade it for a lump-jaw steer coming down with blackleg, even." This was certainly putting it rather strongly, but Pink refused to take notice of the insult.

"Adeline," he asserted calmly, "is all right; she sure suits me; and you'll all learn to love her in time." To prove it, he deliberately rewound the alarm and turned the hands so that there would be no delay in the result.

The clock gave a little whir, as if it were clearing its throat, and, beginning at the very first note, pingled its way indefatigably through the tune; dwelt lovingly upon the last "Sweet A-a-deli-i-ine," and began all over again. When wound to the limit, it would, as the Happy Family knew to its sorrow, play the tune three times from beginning to end, and the last time it would repeat, very pensively, the soul-stirring chorus—all without stopping to take breath. They knew, because Pink had bought it four days ago, and since then they had listened to it—well, anywhere from ten thousand to ten million times, according to the individual pessimism of the one making the estimate.

Before it had got past the "brookside" in the first verse, Irish had gone out profanely and had tried to take the door

with him—if one may judge by the vicious yank he gave it. And before it had trailed "Adeline" to the last gasp, the entire audience had departed, saying things.

Pink, left alone with his treasure, smiled wickedly to himself, and polished its glass and nickeled exterior solicitously with his silk neckerchief. Then, still smiling, he wound the alarm again, set it for ten o'clock—at which time, unless something unforeseen occurred, the Happy Family would be just dropping into slumber-town—and placed the clock back on the coffee-box table, where it ticked away as innocently as if it were not prepared to precipitate family dissension. Like its owner and master it was, in point of a deceiving outward appearance; for Pink, while he put on his overshoes and hunted his hat and made a cigarette, looked the most innocent of slim young cow-punchers.

When he went down the hill to help the others feed the horses and make all snug for the night, he was whistling "Sweet Adeline" just above a whisper; and he was still smiling, in the places where the tune halted artistically. When he reached the stable he stopped whistling and fitted the words to the despised tune:

Sweet Adeline, my Adeline,
At night, dear heart, for you I pine;
Through all my dreams
Your fair face beams——
You're the flower of my heart, sweet
A-adel-i-i-ine!

"Oh, for Heaven's sake!" Irish implored from a stall where he was stuffing the manger with sweet-smelling blue-joint. "Go up on the Hog's Back, if yuh must yawp that thing all the time."

"Don't yuh like it?" came the gently surprised voice of Pink, as he peered into the stall where was Irish crowding down the last wisps of hay.

Irish simply looked at him, half-tempted to be downright angry; only Pink was the sort of fellow who seems able to do and say almost anything with impunity. So Irish ended his glare in a smile, and then tried to belie the smile with a threat.

"You and sweet Adeline is going to come to grief, some uh these times," he said solemnly. "I've known uh men being lynched for less; and as for Adeline—well, if yuh don't want her to have a right bad accident, yuh better give her away. I expect that sheepman's fair daughter would just love to own a clock like that. Yuh might give it to her for a Christmas present."

Seeing this was exactly what Pink intended doing, he said something about loving to see a man mind his own affairs, and went out to where Weary was fussing with the pump in the corral. Weary was foreman, in the absence of both Chip and the Old Man, but you never would guess it from his manner. He went about his work exactly as if he had no authority and no responsibility whatever; only the Happy Family could have told you that the authority and the responsibility were there, ready for emergency.

"Valve leaking yet?" Pink wanted to know when he was close enough.

Weary replied that it was not, but he would be glad of a little help to get the pipe back in the well; so Pink took the hint and stayed and succeeded in getting himself into a fine perspiration and a temper not so fine. Fixing leaky valves in a pump, in the winter, is not what one could call a pleasing diversion. Weary might accomplish the work and still remain in the mood to whistle; that he did, and that the tune was "Sweet Adeline" but rasped the temper of Pink.

It was supper-time when they finally went up to the bunk-house. As they neared the door, came to them divers sounds which seemed to indicate that some one was trying to sing, and that under difficulties; at intervals the tune would end abruptly in a squawk. Then choked-off profanity, some scuffling, and the dull plunk of heavy bodies falling, when would rise the song, wobbly and scarce recognizable.

They went in, and were not surprised to find that Happy Jack was essaying to warble "Sweet Adeline" (it was ever a matter of pain to his hearers when Happy Jack warbled anything) and that Irish was sitting on his dia-

phragm, "jouncing" occasionally in a way that brought out the sentiment of the song in spurts. The rest of the Happy Family was sitting about, making unfeeling bets with one another on the outcome. At that moment the odds were fifteen to one that Happy couldn't sing it all through. And Happy, purple as to countenance and much rumpled as to raiment and hair, was, as he got the breath, taking all comers between verses.

"At night, dear hea-ar-ar-art." (Oh, Lord, Irish!") ("Fer you I pi-i-i-i-ine ——" ("Your gun ag'inst my spurs goes, Cal—— Ouch! That's my ear, darn yuh!") "Through all my dre-e-e-ams Your fair face——" ("You're choking me to death!") "bee-ee-ams ——"

So Happy Jack bellowed his way through the last chorus and gladly consented to desist.

"Yuh see," Jack Bates kindly explained to the late comers, "Adeline has up and disappeared, so Happy was trying to take her place; and I will say," he grinned maliciously at Pink, "he done fine as a substitute. If yuh kept your eyes shut, so yuh couldn't see him, I defy any man to tell the difference."

Pink had no dimples for the occasion. His back ached from wrestling with the pump, and his gloves were sodden wet —a thing Pink abhorred; he was not in the mood to take a joke, and he stalked, stiff-back, over to the table, where he had left Adeline, all ashine and beautiful to look upon, ticking away as contentedly as Pink had smiled when he left it there.

It was not there now, and Pink turned wrathfully upon the hilarious Happy Family. "What yuh done with it?" he demanded testily.

Nobody seemed to know. "You can search *me*," offered Cal placidly.

"*I* wouldn't touch it, by golly, not if yuh paid me for it!" Slim asserted righteously.

"Somebody kidnaped Adeline?" Weary inquired, as one having authority. "Who's got her?"

Nobody seemed to have her, and in such an assembling of innocence Pink's suspicions wandered uncertainly. Irish, alone, had said nothing. He straightened his four-in-hand calmly before the cracked piece of bar-mirror, retied his neckerchief over it, and picked up his hat, remarking that they must all be deaf, or they would know that Patsy had called supper.

"Irish, do yuh know what went with that clock uh mine?" Pink asked him, in a tone that promised things.

"No, and I don't give a damn, so long as it never shows up again," Irish retorted in quite the same tone Pink had used. "Are any of you gazabos going to eat to-night?"

"Oh, all right; you're a nifty bunch —but I could give a pretty straight guess at the abductor, and I'll sure play even," promised Pink, and let the matter rest for the present. It had occurred to him that Adeline was wound up for ten o'clock, and would very probably reveal her whereabouts and the guilty man when the time came. He was sorry that she didn't tick very loud, or he might have traced her by the sound; as it was, he would have to wait.

At ten o'clock that night the guilty slept with the guiltless. There had been nothing interesting to stay up for, and the Happy Family was not bound by convention; if they felt like going to bed right after supper, they did so; and if they wanted to stay awake until three in the morning, they did that also and considered it no one's business but their own.

So at ten o'clock the bunk-house was quiet save for their breathing, and dark save for the yellow glow that came from the half-open door of the stove. Then it was that, muffled under blankets, the little, glass-sided clock lifted plaintively its voice and began tinkling "Sweet Adeline" with all its accustomed cheerfulness. And before the first bar was finished, two forms rose up in the gloom.

"What the——" began Irish fretfully. The music seemed to emanate from somewhere in his bunk.

"So *you're* the one that swiped her!" cried Pink triumphantly. "I thought so all along, darn yuh!"

Irish, digging indignantly among his

blankets, located the disturbance, and threw it, still playing, viciously at Pink. "Yuh put it there yourself," he accused angrily. "And I want to tell yuh right now, yuh frizzle-headed little runt, I've had just about enough uh 'Sweet Adeline.' If yuh don't want her busted a-plenty, yuh better keep her mouth shut when I'm around."

Pink had caught the clock, and so saved it from immediate destruction—and the tune went on inexorably, with never a hitch. He turned the glass sides toward the glow from the stove, and inspected it anxiously.

"Good thing for you, old-timer, that it ain't hurt none," he observed ominously. "And yuh needn't try any loads on *me*. Yuh put it there yourself, and thought I wouldn t find it; yuh didn't have sense enough to find out if the alarm was wound or not. The next man that lays hands on this clock but me, is sure going to have a bunch uh trouble handed out to him."

Irish grunted defiant sentences the while he thumped his pillow into plumpness, and Pink, calmed by the pacific advice of Weary, went back to bed and took the clock with him for safety. It never occurred to him to wonder why Happy Jack was the only man of the lot who snored undisturbed through all the uproar. He was firmly convinced that Irish had done the dastardly deed; and Irish believed, quite as firmly, that Pink had wound the alarm and hidden the clock in his bed deliberately and with malice aforethought.

For that reason they treated each other with some coolness next day. And the Happy Family avoided the subject and talked volubly all through breakfast of other things than musical clocks, and pretended not to notice the fact that Pink and Irish were not wrangling amicably at every possible opportunity, as they were wont to do.

After breakfast Irish went to Dry Lake on an errand for Weary, and to get the mail; that night he did not return, and Weary's face was a bit long at supper when he looked at the empty place. Still no one commented upon the absence of Irish. The Happy Family knew quite well what kept him, and, as a matter of course, tactfully concealed the knowledge with an elaboration that deceived nobody.

The next day Irish did not return, and the Happy Family resolved, individually and privately, to find an errand to Dry Lake on the morrow. But the morrow brought Irish early—a silent, red-lipped, surly Irish, who went straight to the bunk-house and to bed, though the sun was scarce risen. Pink it was who cared for the horse Irish had ridden, and who ventured in to ask him if some coffee wouldn't look good to him before he took a sleep.

Irish growled something which Pink took for a refusal of the coffee and a request to be left alone, and went out softly. When Cal Emmett, meeting Pink just outside the door, looked a question, Pink took him by the shoulder and faced him the other way.

"Better not go up against him right now," he advised, "if yuh don't want to be cussed till yuh get the earache. He's plumb savage."

Irish heard, and swore under the blankets. He *was* savage, all right—with himself, first of all, for being so great a fool as to let whisky down him; with the world, on general principles; with the Happy Family for being, one and all, able to take a few drinks and let it stop there. But first, last, and most, he was savage with one Irish Mallory; and for that reason it were better to leave him alone until his mental atmosphere cleared somewhat, as Pink had wisely advised.

It were a pity that the wisdom of Pink failed to last the day out. But Pink was ever weak when mischief beckoned. At three o'clock, when the Happy Family was sitting idly about the stove in the bunk-house, and the faint rumbling from a far corner told that Irish was asleep, Pink pinched out the fire from his cigarette stub and reached for his clock. Slowly, and with eyes dancing, he wound the alarm to the last turn, and the dimples stood deep in his cheeks. The Happy Family, after a blissful two days of relief from "Sweet Adeline," stirred unhappily.

"Aw, say, have some mercy on a fellow's ears!" pleaded Happy Jack.

"You can stuff cotton in yours. This little warble is for Irish; I owe him one for kidnaping Adeline the other night; and, anyway, he's slept long enough."

Happy Jack reddened guiltily, and said no more.

Pink dusted the clock affectionately, wiped an imaginary finger-print off the polished metal top, and carried it a-tiptoe to the corner where stood the bed of Irish. He made sure the hands were turned for quick results, placed the clock gently down on an up-ended box within three feet of Irish's brown head, and tiptoed back to his place by the stove. The Happy Family sat and waited expectantly.

Came the familiar *gr-r-r,* and they held their breaths lest they mar the effect.

"Pingle-pingle tinkety-tunk a pingle-pungle"—the tune came with great distinctness in the absolutely silent room. The Happy Family fixed its eyes upon the blanket-muffled, six-foot length of Irish.

For ten seconds nothing happened but the detested jingle. Then Irish raised upon an elbow and glared at the clock; pushed the tousled brown hair from his sleep-heavy eyes, and reached to where his gun hung, just over his bed. Deliberately he aimed, fired, saw that the result was as he had intended, and lay down again and composed himself to sleep, the while a shower of wheels, broken springs, glass, and all the small internal organs of Adeline rained down upon the astonished Happy Family.

Pink? He reached the bunk in one long jump, and grabbed Irish roughly by the shoulder. The Happy Family had never seen him look just as he did then, with his eyes as near black as blue can hope to get, and with his teeth shut together so that his jaw came out surprisingly square and stubborn. There was nothing of the girlish softness—it was the face of a fighter that bent close over the bed.

"Get up, darn yuh, and take what's coming!" he gritted. "Get up, before I forget and shoot yuh like the coyote yuh are."

Irish got up, and he came up fighting, smashing out viciously and willingly. It is true he was head and shoulders above Pink, but for all that they were not matched so unevenly as might appear; for Pink was a fighter with much science to back the blows he dealt; and Irish was a fighter by instinct, with little need of science while he had that long, wiry body and the will to use it.

Weary, come just in time to see the shooting of Adeline, sprang for them, and was brushed aside along with the chairs and boxes and other movables. Others of the Happy Family sought to interfere, and were hurled back violently against the walls and one another. There was no staying the physical whirlwind that raged those moments in the Flying U bunk-house.

Back and forth they struggled, bodies locked and arms smashing blows that seemed to find their mark unheeded—except one that Happy Jack got full on his nose, that never had been symmetrical, and that soon after resembled a badly grown beet. Happy Jack and his conscience had been thinking of making peace, but now he retreated, howling, to a far corner, and watched the combat from behind the bulwark of Slim's ungainly form.

Back and forth; so swift, so vicious, that the Happy Family was paralyzed to inaction, and could only keep out of the way, dazed at the suddenness, the deadly seriousness, of it all. For it was deadly serious, as a glance at either of the two gave evidence. In their eyes leered the hate that can kill and be glad; in the blows they gave and took, the ferocity that would break bones and smile.

It was Weary and Cal who stopped them at the last, gripping and holding them apart, the while they glared and ground teeth to be at one another again.

"Cadwolloper, you little villain, you ought to be spanked," said Weary, his sunny drawl a bit strained and unnatural, coming to fill an instant's silence.

But Pink seemed not to hear. "Let me at him, darn yuh! Let me kill the——" Weary's hand clapped over the sweet, curved lips of Pink, cut short the venomous, insulting epithets he would have uttered.

Cal was having troubles of his own with Irish, who fought to reach his gun, and swore many things that he would do to Pink—once he got loose from Cal, whom he called impolitely a dam' tabby-cat meddler.

Jack Bates and Slim, coming to the rescue, helped to hold the two apart, and joined their voices in the general pacific clamor that rose.

"It was only a josh," they cried urgently, but they might better have kept still. Pink and Irish only struggled the more to be free, and swore the more venomously at the peacemakers.

It was Weary who, with something like the gleam of Irish's eyes in his own, suddenly released Pink and got Irish's gun.

"Stand out uh the way, you fellows," he said; and no one had ever heard him speak in just that way before. "Seeing I'm supposed to be running this ranch just now, I'm going to take a hand. You two can fight, if yuh insist—but a lump uh lead goes to the jasper that starts trouble."

Pink sneered, took a second look at the stern face of Weary the sunny, glanced again at the unswerving gun-muzzle, and hesitated; he was not prepared for just this turn. If it had been Cal, or Jack—any one but Weary!

"Yuh mean to say, old-timer, that you'd shoot *me?*" he asked, blank incredulity in face and voice.

"I sure would, if yuh was crazy enough to pass up my warning," Weary snapped. "As long as I've been on this ranch there's never been anything like this happen, nor any such pair uh damn' fools as you two. Are yuh going to gentle down and act white?—or will yuh continue this pleasing little performance and take the consequences?"

Pink hitched up his suspenderless trousers, looked at Weary sidelong, and reached for his cigarette-book. "I'd sure love to kill one Irish Mallory," he remarked sweetly but emphatically; "but I guess it can wait, if you're real anxious. Don't ask me to be nice to him, though; I'm liable to sleep in the stable to-night."

Irish looked down at him and sneered contemptuously. "Yuh needn't trouble," he said bitterly. "When it gets so my best friend pulls my own gun on me, there's just two things to do—wipe out the bunch or drift. I drift—and there's an end of it."

Weary looked at him straightly, and handed him the gun. "You've got a touch uh the weed, Irish. Don't let me stop yuh from taking your choice regardless; if you're pining to smoke us up, go after it."

Irish took the gun, went over and buckled on the belt, and thrust the weapon savagely into its scabbard. Some bits of glass from the annihilated clock crunched under his boot-heels as he did so. He yanked the tarp from his bed, spread it on the floor, laid on it the quilts and blankets and his clothes, folded the whole in shape to be lashed over the back of his packhorse, and dragged it outside, while he went to catch up his two horses from the little pasture. And the Happy Family, still a bit stunned, looked on and said never a word. Pink, his back turned ostentatiously to them all—and especially to Irish—smoked and idly spread a monte deck on his bed between puffs. Only for one of his eyes rapidly swelling shut, and a strip of skin peeled off one cheek, you would not know, to look at Pink, that anything unpleasant had happened.

So, without word of farewell, nor a glance at any one of the Happy Family, Irish for the second time passed away from the Flying U. They heard that he had gone back to the Rocking R country; as a matter of fact, however, he fell in with a cattleman farther to the east, accepted a pack-load of grub and a lot of poison and ammunition, and went wolfing down in the Badlands, where the snowy solitude better suited the black mood he was in.

Pink, riding by chance afar and alone

in the Badlands, was fairly caught in one of those unlooked-for, deadly blizzards that come down upon the rangeland so often in winter. The weather had been mild—a chinook wind that blew soft from the distant mountain heights, with lazy clouds above and a deceitful promise of spring in the air, though it was but early February. Then, without warning, the bitter north wind crept beneath, so that the temperature fell forty degrees in as many minutes, and Pink, getting hastily inside the "sour-dough" coat that had been tied, a mere concession to the month rather than to the weather, behind the saddle, found himself in a swirl of snow so thick he could scarce see ten feet before him.

It was sheer luck that he had glimpsed the roof of a cabin up the narrow coulée before the blizzard struck. He made for it now, knowing, with the knowledge born of experience, the unwisdom of fighting one's way in a storm like that, when shelter, however poor, is to be had. He kept close to the north wall of the coulée, and went slowly, lest he pass the cabin in the confusing slither of snow and wind.

He almost feared he had passed it by, when his horse moved a few steps aside and stopped. The cabin was so close he could swing out with his quirt and slap the walls. As to size, shape, or condition, he could tell little; but it was shelter, and he swung off, groped for the door, and went in, leaving his horse to huddle, tail to the wind, under the shelter of the cabin wall.

Inside, he blinked stupidly a moment, like an owl disturbed in the sunlight. Then, as his eyes adjusted themselves to the half-light, he saw that the cabin was occupied, or had been. When he looked closer he could see the bundled figure of a man in the one bunk.

Pink was never the one to consider risk; he went at once to the bunk, pulled the blankets off a man's head, and met a pair of eyes that held no welcome staring into his own. "Josephine!" He stared, astonished, and let go the blankets. The man was Irish.

Pink went back to the door, opened it, and looked out; he would have faced almost anything rather than have the same roof shelter them both. But the wind shrieked a challenge, and sent the snow whirling full in the sullen face of him. He could not see a rod from the door. Having no mind to commit suicide on account of Irish or any other man, he shut the door and turned back into the cabin. Now that the first contrast in temperature had worn off, he felt the uncomfortable chill in the room; looked at the stove, and saw that it was cold and cheerless, and that with the wood-box heaped high with fuel.

Pink might wonder at Irish being there within thirty miles of the Flying U, when he was supposed to be down in the Rocking R country; and he might realize to the full the unpleasantness of being snow-bound under the same roof with him; but he was not the fellow to stand with hands in pocket the while. He took out his knife, whittled a generous bundle of shavings from a stick of dry cottonwood, and started a fire. He knew that Irish was watching him surreptitiously from the bunk, though he never once turned his head. It occurred to him that Irish had looked gaunt and had the pallor of the sick, and he wondered what was the matter. He had no intention, though, of asking. Irish had been on the wrong side of their quarrel; he had no business to deliberately shoot a man's property to bits, the way he had done; if he wanted Pink to know what ailed him, why, he had a tongue of his own, and no one would stop him from using it.

Once the fire was going well, Pink, finding no water in the bucket, filled the granite saucepan that served as teakettle with snow scooped hastily from the drift already formed beside the door; put it to melt, and went out to care for his horse. There was not much that he could do for the poor brute; nothing but take off saddle and bridle, hobble him with a piece of rope, and leave him to fend for himself.

When he was through, he found the snow melted and added more from the drift. He was feeling pretty hungry, and meant to get something cooked

with the least possible delay. For that reason he began thoroughly to inspect the box in one corner, where was kept the food supply.

Five minutes after he stood beside the bunk. Irish had not moved, that Pink could see; and his eyes, looking hollowly out from his gaunt, unshaven face, still held the light of antagonism. For stubborn pride those two were nicely matched. But Pink could be distinctly unfriendly without being necessarily silent.

"Say! what do yuh eat down here?" he asked curtly.

"I don't," Irish retorted laconically; and Pink noticed the weakness of his voice. Somehow the sound of it hurt.

He turned away; stopped, and turned back. "What in hell's the matter with yuh?" he snapped, his eyes avoiding the other's.

For a minute Irish seemed not going to answer. Then: "Lumbago—or something. Can't ride, and run out of grub. Let me alone, darn yuh."

Pink went back and looked again through the grub-box. There was the odor of coffee and bacon and stuff—but there was nothing else. He returned to the stove and sat down on a box and poked the ashes in the hearth. The water was bubbling in the stew-pan, but what use was hot water, with nothing to cook?

When the fire burned low he added more wood, and returned to the box and sat down. He made a cigarette, and smoked it; made another, and glanced furtively toward the bunk, half-tempted to offer it to Irish. But Irish had told Pink to let him alone; so Pink smoked the cigarette himself. He wondered how long Irish had been like that, with nothing to eat; but he would have hesitated long before asking. He listened to the rage of the blizzard, and swore at his absolute helplessness. He could keep warmth in the cabin, but that was all he could do.

Afternoon gave place to howling night. Several times Pink went to the door and looked out, and each time the fury of the storm drove him back. The cold, too, was bitter. He kept the fire going, saving the wood as much as possible, so that it would last through the night.

When it grew light again—and Pink, who had not slept, found it weary waiting—he turned, in his most casual manner, toward the bunk.

"Anything I can do for yuh?" he asked, and deliberately made the question bare of all personal feeling.

"No," grunted Irish ungraciously.

Pink went to the door, opened it to a swishing wall of snow, and shut it again immediately; it was quite evident that the storm had not abated. The wood-box was nearly empty, and he bundled into his overcoat to go for more fuel; looked dubiously toward Irish, and came near asking where were the wood-pile and the ax; set his chin stubbornly, and went out with not a word.

The ax, it happened, rested against the wall two feet from the door, the handle sticking out just above the drift. Pink floundered to the corner of the cabin, stumbled over the wood-pile, and went savagely to work upon it. The question of warmth was settled, even if they both starved to death. He kept wondering how long Irish had been without food.

Some time during that day Pink heard a little thump against the door; opened it, and found, chilled on the hard-packed drift, one lone snow-bird, that blinked pathetically up at him. He did not say anything, but he carried it in, killed it without a qualm, and skinned it carefully. It wasn't much—he could hide the little body in one hand—but he put it stewing in plenty of water, and watched over it solicitously. He knew that Irish smelled its savory odor, and was watching him with those cold blue eyes of his.

Pink, salting the cupful of broth and bird to maddening palatability, carried it to the bunk.

"Put yourself outside this, and brace up," he commanded, and set the cup down close beside the other. Then he retreated, and sat down by the stove, with his back turned squarely toward the bunk. Incidentally, he smoked an-

other cigarette, and put more wood in the fire. He could afford now to keep the cabin warm; and presently he wallowed out and chopped more wood to last the night out. Not that he really needed to do so, for the box was full; but he argued that you couldn't have too much—and never owned that he wanted to be out of sight for a while, till Irish had finished the snow-bird.

When he staggered in with his arms piled high with wood, he glanced unconsciously toward the bunk. The cup of broth and bird stood just where he had left it, and it had not been touched. He threw down the wood angrily.

"Say, don't be a darned fool," he cried, going over and standing belligerently beside the bed. "That soup ain't poison. Drink her down, and act like yuh had some sense!"

Irish pulled the blankets closer under his chin. "Drink her yourself," he growled. "I guess you're as hungry as I am. I had some coffee yesterday morning, before you come."

"If I'd 'a' wanted it very bad, I guess I'd 'a' got away with it quick enough," snapped Pink. "Cigarettes is pretty lucky. You drink that, and don't be a plumb idiot." He started back to the stove. "If yuh don't," he flung back over one shoulder, "she sets right there till spring. Damn' if *I'll* ever touch it."

"Same here," Irish retorted doggedly. And that settled the snow-bird.

That night Pink, stupid from hunger, slept until the fire went out, and he wakened half-frozen. There being but the one bed, he sat up with his overcoat on; though, had they been the good friends they once were, he would, as a matter of course, have snuggled in with Irish. While, with numbed fingers, he rekindled the fire, he heard Irish mutter feverishly in his sleep, and gritted his teeth impotently. The cup of snow-bird broth stood where he had left it; and the sight of it worried Pink so that he slept no more. Something, he told himself petulantly, had got to be done. Irish might be sick enough to die; it might be something worse than lumbago—which was bad enough. Whatever it was, Irish had got to have something to eat. He sat scheming ways to make Irish eat that snow-bird, and said unflattering things about a man who would be so blamed pig-headed.

Near daylight something began rubbing against the cabin wall, and Pink swore because the sound rasped his nerves, strained to the highest tension. Without doubt it was his horse.

When the nerves of Pink would bear no more the rubbing and the trampling, he got up wrathfully to drive the horse away, with not an atom of pity for the animal out in that bitter storm, that still howled up the coulée. With a stick of wood in his hand, he pulled open the door, glanced, and shut it quickly. When he opened it again he held his gun ready for use; and the shivering yearling heifer, staring at him from the very door-step, lunged and dropped, a succulent heap, when he fired.

In ten minutes there was an odor of frying beef in the cabin, and Pink was standing over Irish, dimpling and exulting. "Wake up, yuh long-legged old mule, and take a sniff at that steak," he shouted. "You're too darn nice to eat snow-bird soup, but maybe you'll condescend to set your teeth into a yearling steak—with the rest uh the carcass on the door-step waiting to be cooked."

Irish, a bit dazed and groaning a good deal, pulled himself up on an elbow; smelled the steak, and heard it frizzling invitingly, and saw Pink, fork in hand and shining as to eyes; saw, too, the cup with the pitiful little snow-bird frozen in its broth. And into the eyes of Irish came the old look that made him so like Weary.

"I'll take mine rare," he grinned wanly; "a slab the size uh the door, flopped over once and slid onto a hot plate. I'll tend to the salting myself."

"Sure," Pink grinned back at him, and tossed his scanty smoking supply on the pillow. "Better roll a pill while you're waiting."

Three days later Pink and Irish rode together out from the narrow little coulée where huddled the cabin—and they were headed for the Flying U, thirty miles to the west.

The Man Who Was Dead

By Arthur W. Marchmont

Author of "In the Cause of Freedom," "When I Was Czar," Etc.

CHAPTER XXII—(*Continued.*)

LEPOVA sat with a face of steel. Stephanie, on her part, was afraid to speak before him; and I waited in silence for Normia to regain self-command. A long and very embarrassing pause it was.

"I will go away at once—to Belgrade," declared Normia, when she had mastered her agitation. "The truth must be told. You will take me, monsieur?"

"Certainly. I am convinced it is your safest course—the only safe one, indeed," I replied readily.

"Wait," interposed the prince harshly. "A decision like this cannot be made without deliberation. And there is much to be explained."

"I shall not alter my decision," declared Normia firmly.

"We have as yet no confirmation of this gentleman's story."

"I do not need it," she retorted.

"I do, however. He tells us he is the man we believed he himself had killed. In his assumed character he has informed himself of all our plans, and asserts that you, baroness, have known his secret—have been in league with him, in other words."

"I declare——" began Stephanie, when he interrupted her.

"Wait, if you please," he said; and his tone grew increasingly harsh and threatening as he proceeded. "The proof rests with you, baroness. I wish you to realize that entirely. You have been almost the head of everything. You have, we believe, rendered great services to our cause, and we have trusted you implicitly. I shall take your word in this. If you deny what this man has said he is a traitor, and shall answer for it with his life. But"—and he paused—"if you admit it, your treachery will have been a thousandfold greater than his, and you shall surely die for it—if I have to strangle you with my own hands—to avenge my betrayed friends. That I declare on my honor."

Every word was spoken slowly and deliberately, with all the sternness of implacable purpose; and Stephanie's alarm and perplexity waxed with every syllable.

There was a silence lasting for a few tense, awesome moments.

Lepova broke it.

"I do not understand your silence, baroness; but it is well that you should realize all that depends upon your answer. Meanwhile there is a question for you to answer, monsieur. If you are Mr. Pershore, where is the real Gerard Provost?"

"Dead. He was murdered in my rooms in mistake for me."

Normia shuddered.

"When our agents reached the room you two alone were there—he dead, you alive and in possession of the papers he had brought from Belgrade. He had been killed by you. Why?"

"I had no hand in his death. He was dead when I reached the room."

"You accepted the responsibility for the deed then, and afterward you took his name, played his part; became him, in fact. Why?"

This story began in the April issue. The back numbers can be obtained from any newsdealer. Price fifteen cents each.

"I acted as I did at the time because had I not accepted the mistake which your agents made, they would have carried out their appointed work and have taken my life. Afterward it was impossible for me to explain until I had found the real murderer of Provost."

"You were sent to Vienna to destroy our cause; and you took advantage of the mistake to turn spy, you mean?"

"I mean nothing of the sort. I am no spy."

He turned to Stephanie. "Now, baroness."

He had made a mistake, however, in giving her time to collect her thoughts.

"I deny your right—yes, even yours, prince—to question me. My services to the cause——"

"Are now on their trial, madame," he burst in furiously. He raised his voice for the first time, thundering out the words and dashing his clenched fist on the table, his dark eyes flashing with rage. "By Heaven, I say you must answer, and you shall!"

But this outburst had far less terrifying effect on Stephanie than his former cold, concentrated, suppressed passion. She rose and met his look scornfully.

"I see only that your presence while in this mood, Prince Lepova, is an insult to me." Her tone was an excellent assumption of haughty, deeply injured pride.

"For the present I will relieve you of it, then," he replied. "In anticipation of this trouble, I have called together the leaders, and this matter will be submitted to them." Then, turning to me, but obviously speaking at Stephanie, he added: "Of course no one can leave the house in the meantime."

He fired that as a parting shot, and left the room hurriedly.

Stephanie lost not a moment in making her intentions clear.

"He has gone to bring others to hear my answer?" she said directly. "What am I to say?"

"So far as I am concerned, what you will. I will be Gerard Provost no longer, come what may. I ought to have known the value of a Bosnian noble's honor."

"You persist that you are not Provost?"

Normia looked up in surprise at the question, and glanced at us both.

"You know that I am not. Why this pretense?"

"The pretense is yours," she cried, with a flash of anger. "Retract this story, and, as my affianced husband, no one will dare to touch you. Persist in it, and they will treat you as a spy."

"This farce is only intended to mislead Normia. Put an end to it, please."

"I am not misled, Mr. Pershore," said Normia, with a smile which delighted me as much as it enraged Stephanie, who turned on her.

"You wish him to be murdered, then?" the baroness cried viciously.

Normia drew herself up to her full height, paused, and, with a look of intense scorn, said, with slow, cutting contempt: "It would be a better fate for an honorable man than life as the husband of a woman so false as you, Baroness Dolgoroff."

"Yet he was affianced to me!"

"If I know Mr. Pershore, it was as the preface, not of marriage, but of death."

At this the last vestige of Stephanie's self-control took flight.

"He is worthy of your championship, indeed. His hand is red with the blood of Provost, whom he murdered, and he offers it to you."

"So at last you admit that he is Mr. Pershore," replied Normia calmly. And to me: "Mr. Pershore, I beg your forgiveness for having ever been persuaded to doubt you."

"His lips are wet with the kisses of your serving wench Catarina, and he would press them to yours," was Stephanie's next venomous insinuation.

"Your malice is becoming mere stupidity, baroness," returned Normia coldly. "Even to ask you to deny that, Guy, would be an insult."

"On my honor, Normia," I declared, as I pressed my lips to the hand she offered me.

If ever the light of murder shone in a woman's eyes it was in Stephanie's then, as she stood watching us, trembling with passion, her bosom heaving and

her nostrils dilated with her quickly drawn breath.

"I have my answer ready for the prince now. This shall cost you both your lives." And with that she hurried out—obviously to seek Lepova.

Instinctively I opened my arms.

"Normia!"

With a low cry of delight she let me draw her to my heart, and our lips met.

"Ah, Guy, can you ever forgive me?"

"I have never blamed you, sweetheart. You could not know," I whispered.

"What will they do to us?"

"They cannot kill our love, dearest." And our lips met again.

"I do not care—now," she whispered tenderly, as she lifted her eyes, radiant with the light of love, to mine. "I have never feared for myself. I can face even death happily now."

"No, no. We will talk of facing it when it comes. Life is all sweet now, with promise for us both."

As we stood thus, the noise of confused murmurs and disorder in the house below reached our ears; the voices of men raised in angry altercation, and the sound of scurrying footsteps.

A moment later we heard rapid steps approaching the room.

"They are coming, Guy," said Normia.

"Are there any means of escape that way?" I asked, pointing to a door at the opposite end of the room.

"None that I know. Those are the baroness' private apartments only."

"Thank Heaven they cannot harm you!" I whispered, not believing what I said, however.

"I do not fear for myself, Guy. But I have brought you to this."

"Courage, dearest, and hope," I murmured; but my own words mocked me. There was no hope.

"I am not afraid."

Indeed, her coolness was wonderful.

The clamor below seemed to increase—in those desperate circumstances a terrifying sound. My knowledge of her peril and my helplessness to avert it made me, indeed, a coward.

And, when the steps were close to the room, a very paralysis of panic seized me, and I could do nothing but stare blankly at the door, waiting for it to open to admit the men whose coming meant death to us both.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE OPENING SKIRMISH.

Only once before in my life had I known such acute suspense as during the moments when Normia and I stood waiting for the entrance of Prince Lepova and his companions. That had been on the night of Provost's murder, as I waited for the entrance of Arnheim and the other two.

I was almost as scared as a child, and, when the handle of the door was turned, I caught my breath, and felt a chill of sweat break out on my forehead.

But it was Stephanie who entered, not the prince; and, in place of the threatening anger in which she had left us, she was now wild and distraught with agitation, and her face was white to the lips with fear.

"All is lost!" she cried despairingly. "It is your doing. You have ruined us all. Some arrests have already been made, and they accuse me of treachery. The prince has all the leaders here, and we are to go before them. They will kill me! They will kill me! Oh, God! Oh, God! I cannot die!" And she flung herself headlong on a couch, a prey to overwhelming and utterly abject terror.

The sight of her fear made me ashamed of mine. I crossed to her, and laid my hand on her shoulder.

"Tell me what has happened. Come, this will do no good."

She shuddered and quivered, shaking like one in an ague.

"They will kill me! They will kill me!" she moaned over and over again.

"You won't escape by giving way in that fashion," I said bruskly, for the sight of her cowardly fear for herself disgusted me. She had terrorized others readily enough, and had glibly placed their lives in peril.

"There is no escape. We are trapped. Every way out of the house is blocked. They will kill me. There is no escape." And again she gave the reins to her panic.

Normia, on the other hand, was as calm as Stephanie was terror-stricken, and witnessed the breakdown with contemptuous surprise.

"I could not have believed she was such a coward," she said. "I will go and find out what has occurred."

"No, no, you had better not," I protested.

"They will not harm me. Besides, if they mean to, one place is as good as another. Here we are only in a trap, as she says."

"How many rooms are there?" I asked, pointing to Stephanie's apartments.

"Three — boudoir, bedroom, and dressing-room beyond."

"How are the rooms reached—I mean from outside?"

"A corridor runs along that side of them all, and there is a door into each of the first two rooms. The third, the dressing-room, is entered only from the bedroom." She answered me without a sign of agitation.

"If we had a weapon of some sort, we could hold that room against them until some sort of assistance comes; or until we could try an escape in the dark. Have you no weapons?" I asked Stephanie. "For Heaven's sake, rouse yourself!"

"No, no. I have nothing. There is no hope, no escape, I tell you."

I ran through to look at the dressing-room, and found it the best for our purpose.

I had my plan in a moment—to barricade the door of the room so as to allow of no more than one man entering at once, and hold the entrance with some heavy weapon. I was hunting around for something that would serve my purpose, when Normia called me.

"I have a plan, Guy," she said. "I have been listening, and all is much quieter in the house. Probably she has much exaggerated things in her terror. Let me go and find Prince Lepova. If I can induce him to return, we may find a way for you to escape, or, at worst, keep him here as a kind of hostage."

It was a shrewd thought, but too dangerous.

"He would not let you return here; and Heaven alone knows what they would do to you!" I said.

"I have done nothing. They will not harm me. And I have many friends in the house. Let me go, please," she urged.

But even as I hesitated we heard some one coming to the room. Stephanie heard the step also, and sprang up with a cry of fear, and rushed away just as Lepova entered. He was accompanied, to my surprise and relief, by but one man. I did not know him, but the revolver he carried, with a clumsy and ineffectual attempt at concealment, sufficed to show the intentions of the pair.

"Where is Baroness Dolgoroff?"

"She has gone into the room beyond," said Normia, and pointed to the door.

"Are you armed?" he demanded of me.

"No. I came here relying on your pledge. Why do you ask?"

His reply was to glance at the other man, who leveled his revolver at me. "You are a prisoner, of course," he said sternly.

"What is the meaning of this, Prince Lepova?" asked Normia.

"There is treachery somewhere—we are finding out where. You will have to answer to the leaders below, and will have a chance to clear yourself, if you can," he said to me, as I was turning out my pockets at the other man's bidding.

"I will answer for Mr. Pershore, prince," declared Normia.

"You have yet to answer for yourself," was the reply, very harshly spoken, as he went to the door of the boudoir and called to Stephanie.

I shall never forget Normia's cool quick-wittedness at that crisis. She seemed to read my thoughts in the one swift glance that passed between us.

"She has gone to her bedroom,

prince; the room beyond," she said, as calmly as if the position were one of the most ordinary every-day character. "Shall I tell her?" and she went toward him.

"No. Stay here, if you please," he snapped, and went alone through the door.

He was evidently accustomed to regard her as a negligible quantity, and made no allowance for the change in her which my news had brought. She turned back with a careless shrug of the shoulders and a smile, walked leisurely to a lounge chair, which stood close to the man who was covering me, and picked up the cushion and shook it up, as if about to sit down. Then, with another swift, meaning glance at me, she swung the cushion at him sideways.

The next moment his revolver was in my hands instead of his, and, snatching up a heavy bronze figure, I dealt him a blow on the head, which felled him, and knocked all the consciousness out of him.

The groan he gave and the noise of the fall were heard by the prince.

"What's that?" he called from the inner room.

"Your man's had a fit, or something, you'd better come," I replied; and I bent over the man, as if to see what was the matter.

Lepova had drawn his weapon at the noise of the fall, and it was in his hand as he came hurrying out.

"Poor fellow! What is it?" exclaimed Normia, with excellently assumed sympathy in her tone, and not a trace of excitement.

This, together with my attitude, quieted the prince's suspicions. He put his revolver in his pocket, and came to my side and bent down. The next instant he was on his back with my knee on his stomach, and my revolver at his head.

"If you want to live, keep quiet," I said sternly. "I swear to Heaven that if you resist or make a sound I'll fire. You've broken your oath, you know, and sought my life."

Then I took his pistol from him, and satisfied myself that he had no other weapons. He had been taken entirely by surprise, and, reading in my look that I meant mischief, saw that resistance was hopeless at that juncture.

"Lock the big doors, Normia. We shall have some of the others up directly to know what is keeping these two. Then go and find the baroness. We must get to that inner room. Quick. Call to me when the way is clear."

She did it all very quietly and quickly. And when she called to me, I let Lepova get up, keeping his head covered by my pistol all the time.

"Now, prince, we'll have a plain talk. You got me here with a lie, and meant all the time to have my life."

"No. I merely wanted an explanation."

"Well, you're going to have it now. It's this: Your life is safe just so long as our lives are safe—and not one second longer. You've had a proof of what I can do with a pistol, and now that I have yours and this man's, you'll know I mean to put up a fight."

He was very cool, and there was no question about his courage, but he recognized he had no chance.

"You can shoot me, if you will. I can't resist, but that will not save you."

"I mean to do better than shoot you, unless you drive me to it by trying to fool me. I mean to hold you as a hostage for our safety."

"Are you in truth the Englishman, Mr. Pershore?"

"Yes, and a good many degrees more dangerous to you than Provost the spy."

"Will you pledge your honor not to reveal anything you have found out here?"

"A little late to suggest terms, isn't it?"

"You are not out of the house," he replied meaningly. "But if you will give that pledge, and also surrender the Baroness Dolgoroff, you may go free."

"Didn't you hear me say I was an Englishman? Well, we English don't betray women into the hands of such men as you."

"She shall not go," he answered, his face set with anger and resolve.

"That's your last word?"

"Yes, absolutely. Come what may, she shall not escape."

"Then we'll wait and see what the rest say. Just walk ahead of me into that room there. No tricks, mind."

Now that her fear of immediate death had passed, Stephanie's terror had given place to rage, and the instant the prince entered she broke out into a furious tirade against him, until I stopped her and told her pretty bluntly to hold her tongue.

Normia, meanwhile, had anticipated that I should need something with which to bind Lepova, and had found some silken cords, thin, but very strong, which exactly suited the purpose. With these I tied his hands behind him, and then fastened his legs. He bore it all with the same inflexible firmness.

Next I went back to the fellow in the reception-room, and treated him much in the same fashion, but I gagged him in addition, and then hauled him through into the bedroom, bundled him into a closet, and turned the key on him.

Then some one knocked at the door of the big room.

"Monsieur Le Prince! Monsieur Le Prince!" came a call.

"You will answer that call, prince," I said; and, slipping the cords off his legs, took him back to the door.

"Tell them not to disturb you, and that you'll call when you need them."

He hesitated, and shook his head.

"You can take your choice," I whispered, grimly and threateningly.

"Monsieur Le Prince! Monsieur Le Prince!" came the call again, more impatiently.

"I give you five seconds," I growled.

He yielded, but the sweat was in great beads on his forehead.

"What is the matter? I can't be disturbed. I will call you presently," he replied.

I heard the murmur of their voices, and then footsteps as they went away.

He went back to the dressing-room, and I set about making such preparations as I could for the struggle that I knew must come sooner or later.

Now that I had the revolvers I was fairly confident that I could hold the room until dark, when I meant either to attempt an escape by means of the window, or to employ vigorous methods to bring the police to the house. Normia suggested the latter plan. It was to bring into our room everything breakable, and throw it out of the window in the dark, when the streets were quiet.

The window was about twenty feet from the ground—too far to jump, and, unfortunately, it looked out upon a portion of the grounds. But the noise of the crash which we could make was likely to be heard for some distance, and so attract attention.

When the preparations were completed, I told Normia the idea of attempting an escape by the window, and set her to tear up the sheets and blankets from Stephanie's bed, and twist the strips into a rope; and while she was busy with this, a loud knocking at the big folding doors told us that the patience of the men had given out.

I tried the same ruse as before, but it failed. Those outside declared they would only be satisfied if the prince opened the door himself, in proof that all was well with him.

I was prepared for this result, and when the first blows came, indicating that the doors were to be battered in, I took him back to the door of the "fortress," tied his legs again, and placed him so that he should be in full sight of his friends the instant they entered. I stood behind him, with my drawn revolver.

"You'd better understand, prince," I said, with intense earnestness, "that your life depends on what your men do. You can tell them what you please, but if they attempt to rescue you or to get in here, it will be your death sentence."

I meant it, every syllable; and he knew it. He had broken faith with me, and I was fighting for Normia's safety, as well as my own life.

We had not long to wait. A few minutes elapsed, and then a big crash and splintering wood proclaimed that

they had rushed the doors. They came quickly across the big room and through the boudoir, only to halt with cries of anger and confusion at the door of the bedroom on seeing Lepova's plight.

In the midst of the medley a shot was fired, and then I saw one of the men at the front in the act of aiming at me. Quick as light I fired, and he fell back into the arms of a man behind him, as his revolver dropped on the floor in front.

"My next shot will be for the prince," I cried, in a ringing tone; and at that they hung back and huddled together like a flock of startled sheep.

"What does it mean, prince?" called one of them.

"That I am a prisoner, as you see; and this man has sworn to take my life if you attempt a rescue," answered Lepova promptly. "You can tell whether he means what he says by the death of Veloskov there."

They turned and held a conference, and presently one of them stooped forward to recover the fallen revolver.

"Leave that!" I called.

But he would not. With a snatch he grasped it, only to drop it again instantly, with a cry of pain, as I fired and broke his arm. I could well afford one cartridge to secure half a dozen more.

It was the last argument they needed, and, without showing their faces again,, they turned and went off in a body.

The honors of the opening skirmish were distinctly with me. I had increased my ammunition by fifty per cent., had put two of the enemy out of the fight, and had filled every man of them with a wholesome belief in my capacity to shoot straight.

A heavy gain under the circumstances.

CHAPTER XXIII.

AN ASSAULT IN FORCE.

The effect was seen at once. As soon as I had picked up the third revolver the prince opened negotiations for a truce.

"Can't we come to terms, Mr. Pershore? What is it you want?" he asked.

"To get out of here in safety—all three of us."

"You are at liberty to go. I'll answer for my followers."

I smiled. "Thank you, but who is to answer for you?"

"I pledge my honor."

"I trusted to that before. I can't trust you. I'm not saying this merely to insult you, but nothing you can say will induce me to do it again."

"But there must be some means," he persisted. "I'll do anything you wish."

"Yes, there's one way. There is some one to whom I could write, and he'd send and get me out promptly enough."

"Do you mean the police?" he asked.

"Much the same thing—but soldiers, probably."

"I should be mad to do it."

"No. Your people can clear out, and I'll explain your presence plausibly."

He thought it over, frowning heavily.

"It would be the same thing if the house were cleared," he said next.

"Yes—if!" And I shook my head.

"But this sort of thing can't go on forever," he exclaimed testily.

"I mean to bring the police here myself as soon as it's dark, and my report then will be awkward for you. You planned my murder, you know."

"No, no, no," he protested, and, after a pause: "If your letter is sent will you promise to keep secret everything concerning matters here?"

"How can I? The facts must be told about Normia. It is as much to me to clear her from the danger into which you two have forced her as it is to get away from here."

"You are unreasonable," he retorted very angrily.

"Let the others decide it, then," I said.

"Not the baroness," he declared grimly. "She shall answer for her treachery."

Stephanie broke her long silence with a burst of indignant repudiation of the charge of treachery, but the prince silenced her at once.

"You lie!" he cried fiercely, and then it came out that he knew of Count Kass-

ler's visits and of her attempted betrayal of Normia.

But Normia sided with me.

"Whether she has done this or not, we cannot leave here without her," she declared firmly.

"You two are giving your lives for one who has done her utmost against you both," was the prince's reply.

"You are giving yours in the futile effort to punish her," I said. "But the matter is settled. You can arrange for us all three to leave in safety, or none."

"She shall not escape," he growled vindictively, and the discussion ended.

Normia and I crossed and sat by the window. It was growing dark, and I was beginning to be impatient for the time to come for our attempt to attract help from outside.

More than an hour had passed in this way, and all the time the men had given no sign or sound of an intention to renew the attack. Before it was quite dark I shut and barricaded the door, and Normia and I discussed the attempt to bring the police to the house.

"It is the back of the house, Guy, remember, and very far from the street where any police will be."

"Sounds travel well at night."

"I should not build too much upon it," she answered. "I don't wish to dash your hopes, you know that, but I don't want you to be too disappointed if the attempt should fail."

"Your courage is wonderful, Normia," I cried.

"What is that?" she asked, with a start, as we heard movements in the room above.

We listened intently. Men tramped about the room, and then began to move the furniture. Hammering followed, and a noise like the ripping up of planks.

Directly afterward Stephanie cried out in alarm, as heavy blows were struck against the ceiling of the room below, setting the floor trembling and shaking with the concussion.

"They are going to break a way through from above and below," said Normia instantly. Nothing appeared able to shake her coolness.

"It sounds like it," I agreed. "We'll give them something else to think about, but I wish they had waited a bit. We'll send out our signals of distress, Normia."

It was already dark enough for the purpose, but too early in the evening. I had intended to wait until the city was quiet, but the form of the new attack rendered me too uneasy to wait longer.

I opened the window, and as Normia handed me some large glass and china ornaments and some pictures I dashed them to the ground, and at the same time sent up loud shouts for the police at the top of my lung power.

At the first crash the hammering ceased, and the rush of footsteps told us that we had, at any rate, created a diversion.

I continued to hurl the things out, and sent up another shout for the police; but the response was not at all what I had looked for. As I stood on the little balcony, some one fired from below, and the bullet whizzed past my head and struck the wall just behind me. This drove me in, of course; indeed, Normia caught hold of my arm and pulled me back.

And that was the only result of the attempt. Standing inside, out of range of those below, I continued to throw out everything that was breakable or likely to make a noise; and the clattering, smashing din seemed enough to raise the dead. But nothing came of it except that the work of breaking into the room was delayed for the time.

My disappointment was keen. I had counted so surely upon attracting attention and bringing help to us that the failure forced home the fear that I had altogether underestimated the peril of our position.

Normia saw how deep was my disappointment.

"It has had one good result, Guy," she said cheerfully; "it has stopped the other preparations." Then she slipped her hands into mine, and added in a whisper: "I am so sorry."

"It makes a difference, of course; but

we still have the hostage, thanks to you."

"I am sure you will get us out," she declared, with absolute confidence.

Lepova understood the significance of the failure, and, while disposed to rejoice at it, perceived also how it might affect him.

"You see, you cannot get help from outside, Mr. Pershore."

"It may prove awkward for you, too, prince," I returned curtly.

"It is still open for you and Normia to leave."

"Guy!" cried Stephanie, quick to take alarm.

"I understand the use of that name, baroness," put in Lepova testily.

"We all go, or all stay; I have no other answer," I said.

"You must see you have no hope of escape," he sputtered.

"I don't see it yet. It depends on how many of these brutes of yours are ready to lose their lives, and whether they are resolved to force me to take yours. And now, if you have nothing else but a cowardly betrayal to propose, keep silent. I am in no mood for such talk."

I had, indeed, a perplexing problem to solve. It was not difficult to guess at the men's plans. The capture of Lepova had made things very complicated for them, and they had waited for the darkness, to try and take us by surprise. Their idea was to render it possible to enter the room from two or three points at once—from below, by the door, and probably by the window, while from the hole in the ceiling they would command the whole room and so be able to fire at me while I was engaged in the fight with those who entered.

My first consideration was, therefore, to find a spot where Normia and Stephanie would be unseen by them and out of the way of stray bullets. This was fortunately easy enough. Close to the window was a cupboard in which the two would be concealed and at the same time able to keep some sort of watch against a surprise by the window.

I told Normia this part of my plan, and showed her where she must station herself.

"Can you use a revolver?" I asked her.

"Unfortunately, no. But, if I could, I can see nothing except that the darkness is a little less dense than it was just now."

"Then you must trust your ears, and, if you see or hear anything, just call 'Guy!' No more; I shall understand. We'll have the window up. If they go on with that hole up there we shall have a cloud of dust down when the ceiling falls thick enough to choke us."

I threw the sash up, and from her post she peered out into the night. "I can't see much," she declared a little dolefully.

"Try to concentrate all your thoughts on watching that balcony, and, as you crouch there, look for some spot where the background to your line of sight is a little less dark than the rest, so that a man's shadow would be shown darker between it and you. There's a white building across there. Force your eyes and they'll soon obey you."

She soon picked up my meaning, and was testing her eyes, when the work above and below us was resumed with great vigor.

The hammering enabled me to locate the probable position of both openings; and I selected a spot, close to the door, from which I could command both that and the opening from below.

I tied Lepova securely to the chair on which he sat, and fastened a cloak round him long enough for its folds to cover me as I crouched beside him.

From my post I could shoot any one who ventured up from below or entered by the door. But as I waited it occurred to me that I could save some of my ammunition if I had something that would serve as a club. I hunted round, therefore, and found a heavy bronze statuette, which I had brought from one of the other rooms with the intention of flinging it, with the rest of the things, out of the window.

There was one weak spot in our defenses—the window. But I was, nevertheless, pretty confident of success in

beating off the attack. I had one advantage, which would more than counterbalance the weakness. The darkness which would baffle and hinder our assailants was but little hindrance to me. I could see across the room quite well enough to make me sure of sending a bullet home. And I was fully resolved to fire every shot to kill.

There was another point in my favor. I did not, of course, know how many men were engaged in the attack upon us; but judged that there were not likely to be more than a dozen. To make such an attack as they were planning necessitated their splitting themselves up into small parties, and, unless they timed the simultaneous entrance exactly—an extremely difficult task under such conditions—I should be able to deal with each in turn.

The work above was the first to be finished. Down came a large square of the ceiling right on top of Lepova, completely covering him with white, and sending up a suffocating cloud of dust, through which the light in the room above showed. Taking advantage of this, one of the men above tried to catch a glimpse of our room. Either that, or else he had been caught by surprise by the fall of the ceiling.

I saw him, and fired instantly. There was a groan; the light was extinguished; the body was dragged away; and I heard the footsteps of one man as he hurried out of the room.

The work below continued uninterrupted, and, at the same time, some heavy blows were struck at our door, to break it in.

Almost at the same moment Normia called my name quickly—the agreed signal that some one was entering by the window.

In a moment I was across the room, and reached the window just as a man set his foot to climb on to the balcony from the ladder.

It was Alexandrov, the Greek. I leveled my revolver; but there was no need to shoot. His position placed him at my mercy. A blow was enough, and just as I struck him he recognized me. He threw up his hands, uttered a fierce oath, lost his balance, and, with a piercing scream, fell backward to the ground.

At the same time our door was broken in, my barricade was thrust on one side and sent toppling down, and the floor boards in the center of the room were smashed upward from below.

The noise and racket were deafening, and Stephanie screamed.

As I rushed back to my post I heard the men return to the room above, and it was plain that the attack was about to open in force.

I crouched down behind Lepova, expectant and confident, both eyes and ears strained to the uttermost, as I waited for my first need to shoot.

CHAPTER XXIV.

STEPHANIE'S LAST TREACHERY.

A pause followed the breaking in of the door, and in it I caught the shuffling of feet outside. I guessed they were waiting for some signal. Then a ladder was pushed up through the opening from below, and some one began to climb, and at the same moment Normia called to me again.

They were timing matters better now. I had to let the window attack take its chance. To have crossed the room now would have drawn on me the fire of those above, while at the same time leaving the more dangerous places unguarded.

But it decided me to run a risk. Lying at full length, I peered down at the fellow who was on the ladder, fired at him rapidly, and was back under cover of Lepova before the man above could have time to aim.

My shot was the signal for those waiting at the door to rush in; but the luck was all with me. One of the chairs which I had used for the impromptu barricade had fallen right in the entrance, and over this the first comer fell asprawl, close to my side. The second man did not get as far. A bullet from my revolver stopped him, and, snatching up the bronze figure, I

smashed it down on the first man's head with a force that stunned him.

"Curse the darkness!" growled a voice in the doorway. I caught a sight of the speaker, as he stood hesitating, fired, and hit him somewhere, for he went off groaning and cursing volubly.

This shot drew the fire from above. Three or four shots came as fast as the man could pull the trigger. But I was safe under cover of Lepova's chair.

That the prince was not hit was little short of a miracle.

"Are you mad?" he shouted fiercely. "You are firing at me." And with that the attack ended; for the fellow who had entered by the window, perceiving how things had gone, turned tail and bolted.

"You'll admit, now, that we are not likely to be taken," I said to Lepova. "Will you end this and arrange for us to leave?"

"Normia and you—yes."

"I mean the three of us."

"No," he replied, with the same dogged vindictiveness against Stephanie he had shown throughout. "You have beaten off this attack, but there can be only one end to it. You can't hold out against time."

"It's your life as well as ours," I reminded him.

"My life is nothing compared with her punishment."

And to this decision he held inflexibly.

But what he said was true. We could not hold out indefinitely. Even if no further attempt was made during the night, the light would render our position much more precarious.

The darkness had proved our friend, but when the daylight came a couple of men posted at the gap overhead would have us all at their mercy. A single movement anywhere by any of us would draw their fire, and even if we had twenty lives each, they could all be taken at leisure.

In a word, it was a sheer impossibility for us to remain where we were.

Yet how were we to get out?

I had thought, in the first instance, of escaping by the window; but, in view of the fact that that had been used to get at us, I abandoned the idea. To hope to get away by the reception-chamber and the main staircase was equally futile. It would be but to walk into the arms of the "enemy."

There remained only the two openings which the men had made. And then I began to get the glimmering of a plan.

I might safely reckon on the probability that the men were just as alive as I was to the advantage which the daylight would give them. They had learned the risks of attacking us in the dark, and I judged that they would now calculate they had us safe in a trap from which escape was impossible.

I set about pressing this belief upon Lepova at once, therefore, lest he should see what we were about to do and raise the alarm. Indeed, I designed to use him for that very purpose—but it should be a false alarm.

I replaced the barricade at the door as best I could, and the noise I made brought some one to the room below.

"Is all well with you, prince?"

"Never mind about me. You have only to wait until daylight——"

"Silence!" I burst in fiercely.

"We have thought of that, and are watching," came the reply.

There was a whispered conversation below, and then one man walked away.

I stole across to Normia and Stephanie, and held a conference. I told them that it was not possible for us to remain in the room after dawn, and that any spot in the house would be safer than where we were. Stephanie knew the house well, and explained that if we could get to the floor below she could guide us to a side door by which we could escape from the house.

I then detailed my plan. It was very simple; but if we played up to it well, as likely to succeed as any more elaborate one. It was to mislead the men into the belief that we intended to escape to the upper floor, to cause Lepova to share that belief, and to trick him into giving an alarm of our intention to his followers, and so draw away

the men from the lower part of the house.

Still speaking in whispers, but gradually raising my voice, I put some questions to Stephanie about the upper floors of the house, and whether we could get to any room at the front from which we could attract the attention of people in the street.

Having made sure that he had heard this, I returned to my place behind him and said that I had determined to risk an attempt to escape—"by the room below," I told him, but I knew he would construe this to mean the room above—and I swore that if he gave a sound of warning I would blow his brains out. I forced him to take an oath to keep silence, and made much of this part of the business, and finished it by fastening a gag in his mouth. But I took care to do this clumsily, so that he could work it sufficiently loose to be able to shout when I wanted him to shout.

Next, I made noise enough to bring the men running back to the room below, and then called to Normia and Stephanie to be ready.

The man whose head I had broken in the mêlée was now showing signs of returning consciousness, so I hauled him to the mouth of the opening and toppled him headlong down among his friends, who were clustered at the bottom.

I had seen that Lepova was observing me closely, and, being aware, as he thought, of my real intention, was wriggling and grimacing to free himself from the gag so that he could shout a warning. I had given him time to do this, indeed.

The instant I heard the man fall to the floor below I seized the ladder, a very light one, fortunately, and dragged it up to the room.

"Now, Normia, up at once," I cried, as I placed it to the opening overhead. She ran to it and set her foot on the first rung, when Lepova cried out with all the force of his powerful lungs:

"They are escaping to the top room. Quick! Quick!"

"You treacherous devil, you overheard us!" I thundered; and, calculating that a little touch of realism was worth a cartridge, I fired my revolver in the air, as if I had shot him.

"Never mind me! Quick! Quick!" he called, thus rendering us invaluable aid.

There was a stampede from the room below, just as I had calculated, and, as soon as the coast was clear, I slipped the ladder back to its old place.

"Follow me quickly, for God's sake!" I whispered to Normia, as I got on the ladder and slid down.

But we were not out of the wood yet. As I neared the bottom there was a muttered oath out of the darkness, and I felt the burning stab of a knife in my back, and before I could get my feet a man gripped me and began shouting at the top of his voice to the rest to come back.

Maddened with rage and pain, and utterly desperate, I grappled him, and down we went headlong.

Fortunately I was much the stronger of the two, and at last succeeded in getting my right hand free, when I brought down the butt end of my revolver with crashing force on his face, and a second time on his head.

Bruised, breathless, and rather dizzy as the result of the struggle, I scrambled up to find both Normia and Stephanie at the foot of the ladder.

Lepova, in the meanwhile, in the room over us, was keeping up a mad racket, drumming his heels on the floor, raving and shouting to the others how we had escaped, and yelling directions to them what to do.

"Lead the way—quick!" I said to Stephanie. "We shall have those devils back on us in a minute."

"You are hurt, Guy," cried Normia.

"No," I lied. I dared not scare them by saying anything about that knife-thrust. "I'm only out of breath. Quick, Stephanie!"

But she had lost her head, and stood staring about her like a dazed rabbit. "I can't think for the moment just where we are," she muttered.

"There's no time to think. We must take our chance." And I made for a door which stood open. It led into a corridor, and as we stood a second on

the threshold I heard a noise to the right which I took to be caused by the return of the men who were hunting us.

I ran off to the left, therefore, calling to the others to keep close to me. But I had not gone half a dozen yards when, just above our heads, as it seemed, we heard the rapid, heavy steps of the men dashing down a staircase right upon us.

The darkness here was profound, and our only hope was that it would shield us. I got the other two past the foot of the stairs—the row that Lepova was keeping up preventing our movements from being heard—and whispering to them to crouch down in the passage, I stood in front of them, jammed flat against the wall, holding my breath as three or four men came racing down.

Without a thought that we were within arm's length of them, they turned in the opposite direction, making for the room we had just left.

The instant they had gone I pulled Normia's arm—she was next to me—and whispered:

"Up the stairs—quick, and as silently as you can."

"Where are you going?" asked Stephanie, who was trembling violently.

"Don't talk," I answered angrily. "Go!" And I pushed her after Normia and followed.

Not a second too soon.

"Turn up the lights, some one," called a voice, and we were not up the stairs before the whole place below was flooded with the electric light.

"The first room that opens on the front of the house," I said, as we reached the landing above.

Stephanie appeared to recover some of her dazed wits when the light came.

"The third door on the left," she whispered, as she ran past Normia.

Just at the head of the staircase, and on our right was the door of one of Stephanie's rooms, with which our "fortress" room communicated, and as I passed it the key was turned by some one inside.

Then suddenly the electric light was switched on, and at the other end of the corridor another search-party appeared, just as Lepova and a companion ran out from the room behind us.

From both parties came loud cries, as they caught sight of us, and shouts to us to surrender.

It was then Stephanie committed an act so base and treacherous that I would not have believed it possible even she would have been guilty of it.

She was already at the door of a room and held it open. I was about a couple of yards behind Normia when she reached the room; and as I was feeling the loss of blood from my wound and the general effects of the struggle, I was moving slowly, and no doubt presented a very sorry appearance.

Stephanie cried out that I was hurt, and as Normia, instead of entering the room, turned and put out a hand, as if to help me, Stephanie deliberately pushed her away across the passage, drew me into the room, just as two or three shots were fired, and slammed the door. It was such a diabolical act of treachery that I could have it in me to strike her.

"You had to be saved, Guy!" she said.

"To hell with saving me!" I roared savagely, and when she would not loose her hold of the door I dragged her away and sent her staggering back into the room, while I tore it open.

I had but a second to spare.

The men from the farther end were close up then, and Lepova stood holding Normia and threatening her.

Mad with fury, I struck him with my revolver in the face, and, catching hold of Normia, pulled her past me into the room. Lepova made a vain effort to grab her dress, and then, seizing his companion's weapon, fired two shots at me. But, in his excitement, the aim was bad and the bullets went wide.

Then he and his companion hurled themselves at the door to prevent my shutting it, and one of them thrust his foot in as a wedge. It was no time for scruples, so I fired a shot into the leg and kicked the foot clear of the door.

Meanwhile, Stephanie, either led by curiosity to see the result of her treachery, or meditating some further trick,

had crept up behind on my right hand. Lepova caught sight of her, and his revolver flashed out just as I succeeded in slamming and locking the door.

The room was in utter darkness, and, coming straight out of the lighted passage, I could not make out a single object. But I felt about, and, seizing anything and everything I could lay my hands on, piled it up against the door.

"Have the light on a moment, Guy—the switch is by the door," said Normia.

I turned on the light and Normia gave a cry of horror.

Stephanie was lying huddled up on the floor, just beyond the crude heap of tables and chairs and things I had piled up as a barricade.

"She must have been hit by that last shot of Lepova's," I said, and I was going to her, when Normia saw the blood which had oozed from the wound in my back.

"Oh, Guy, you are wounded!" she cried, her face as gray as death.

"Only a scratch—don't worry. I can hold out all right."

But it was far from all right, and in that momentary pause from the excitement which had kept me going I began to feel both weak and dizzy.

"Let me see to it at once. My life depends on it, remember," she said, when I protested. But we had no time to settle the point.

With a crash that startled us both the door was broken down. Half a dozen men rushed into the room, and we were looking down their leveled muskets.

Normia, like the plucky little soul she was, put herself right between me and the guns, as I sprang up to make a last fight for it.

"Surrender, or we fire!" thundered the man in command of the party.

I gazed at them half-stupidly, and then understood.

"We surrender," I said, and tossed my revolver down on the floor, with a laugh. "It's all right, Normia. Thank God!"

With a sigh of intense relief I fell back on a couch, weak and faint, and with little more than a vague and feeble appreciation of anything except that the struggle was over and had ended in victory.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE END.

I have no very clear recollection of the order in which things occurred after the door was broken in and Normia and I were made prisoners.

So far as Lepova's gang was concerned we were safe, and that was enough for the present.

I was utterly used up. It turned out that I had lost a good deal of blood from the knife-thrust in my shoulder, and as soon as the excitement and strain were over I collapsed. I did not actually faint; I did not lose consciousness, that is; but I lolled on the couch and looked on with a queer, detached feeling that nothing mattered; that I was merely a spectator, and that the proceedings had no sort of direct concern for me.

Even when Normia was taken out of the room it did not rouse me. I told her I was sure it would all come right; and when some one came and dressed my wound, and I was carried away, I did not bother myself to ask where they were taking me.

My one consuming desire was to rest; and the instant I was placed in a carriage I fell asleep and remember little more until they woke me late in the day. I learned that I was in the infirmary of one of the prisons, and found the police at my bedside, waiting to interrogate me, under the belief that I was one of the leaders of the Black House conspiracy.

It is a cowardly thing to catch a man between sleeping and waking and proceed to badger him with questions in order to lead him to incriminate himself. I would not answer, did not even give my name. Indeed, I was more afraid of doing that than anything, on account of the possible charge of murder. So I insisted upon communicating with my friend the minister, and refused to utter a word in the meantime.

He sent one of his secretaries, and to him I dictated a full account of things as I knew them, and in response an order came that I was to be taken to him as soon as I could leave the infirmary.

My wound was not a serious one. The rest had relieved the inflammation, and after another long sleep, lasting right through the night, I was sufficiently recovered to be able to go to him.

He told me that the conspiracy had been entirely broken up, that Lepova was in the hands of the authorities, that others had been captured in the raid, and that the rest of them had probably fled.

The raid had been the indirect result of Stephanie's treachery. When she found that she had been discovered she had told her confidential servant to find Count Kassler and tell him that she was in danger of her life. The servant had contrived to get away from the Black House during the night, and had found the count after much delay. A party of police and soldiers had been despatched at once, and they had arrived just as we had broken out of the "fortress" room.

Some of these were the men we had seen at the far end of the corridor when Stephanie, not recognizing them, had made that last dastardly attempt to shut Normia out from our last place of refuge.

She had paid with her life for that act. In his fury at her betrayal Lepova had risked capture in order to be revenged. He knew that the men were soldiers sent to save her, and, rather than make his own escape, he had risked that last frantic attempt to get into the room to kill her. He had found his opportunity when I had opened the door to save Normia.

Of Normia I could learn nothing except that she was a prisoner, and would certainly be sent to Belgrade. I could not prevail upon the minister to stir a finger on her behalf, nor even to secure me an interview with her. He would not enter into the least discussion about her case, and gave me unmistakably to understand that, in his view, she had deserved whatever might be done to her.

He was scarcely more cheering about my own affairs. I must clear myself from the suspicion of having murdered Gerard Provost, he said, and added very bluntly and significantly that I could not afford to lose a single hour in getting to work.

Alexandrov was not among the prisoners taken at the Black House, it turned out, much to my dismay, and my old friend did not hesitate to insist on the fact that I could not feel safe until he had been traced and handed over to the police, together with sufficient proofs of his guilt.

For this purpose he sent for one of the most astute of the secret police agents, to whom the facts were told, and, accompanied by him, we started on the quest.

The agent was anything but a cheering companion, despite his reputation for cleverness. He had an inveterate hatred of Englishmen. He did not believe my story, and did not hesitate to let me see that, and added, with sinister significance, that he would be my constant companion until I had either proved my innocence or been myself arrested upon the charge.

"I tell you this," he declared frankly, "so that you may know how I shall regard everything you say to me."

"That's a very comforting assurance," I replied dryly.

We went first to old Steinberg in search of Dromach. The latter was at home, and his statement tended in some slight degree to shake the agent's conviction. The Greek was able to describe the dagger very clearly. He accounted for his possession of it, and declared that he had sold it to Alexandrov on the very eve of his departure from Vienna.

We did not tell him the reason why it had to be traced, as the agent suggested that he would probably disappear if he knew that he had to testify against a fellow countryman. And for that same reason it was decided to place him in confinement meanwhile—a convenient little arrangement of the Austrian law.

The next thing was for him to iden-

tify the dagger itself. The agent had something very disagreeable to say about this. It appeared incredible to him that I should have allowed such an important piece of evidence to go out of my own hands. "Assuming that you did give it to this woman"—this was Catarina, of course—"a matter very difficult to believe—it is extremely unlikely that you will ever see it again. But we can go to her, if you think it is any use."

He depressed me to such an extent that I was almost inclined to share his gloomy opinion, and on the drive to Catarina's house—to which we took Dromach, as I wished him to tell her his story about the dagger—I could see nothing but failure and ruin ahead.

I left the two in the carriage—not without a protest from the man—and I saw her alone in the first instance. I found her more hostile than ever, and full of suspicion as to my present purpose. She would scarcely remain in the room, and denied volubly that she knew anything about Alexandrov's whereabouts. He had been threatened by the police, and had fled in consequence, she declared, repeating it more than once.

"Where is the dagger? Give it me," I replied.

"I gave it to Alexandrov, of course. He has it," was her answer, to my profound dismay.

"You had no right to do that, Catarina. You have given him the very evidence that would convict him and clear me. You have ruined me!" I cried, aghast.

"It is safe. When Dromach is found it will be forthcoming."

"Dromach is in the carriage outside waiting to identify the thing. He sold it to Alexandrov."

At this she changed color.

"He is not here in Vienna even. I know that," she said.

My reply was to fetch in the Greek; and in the presence of the agent he repeated what he had already told us. Catarina was intensely moved as she listened. Her look grew darker and darker as Alexandrov's lies were proved; her frown deepened, she turned white as death itself, and her eyes glowed with rising passion.

"I think I can find the dagger, that you may see it," she said, and left the room. I heard her go into an adjoining room, come out, and then climb the staircase.

At that point the police agent justified his reputation for shrewdness.

"Who is in the house?" he asked quickly.

"I don't know. What do you mean?"

"She must be watched. Come—quick!" and together we followed her.

She went into a room up-stairs at the back and turned the key. He signed to me, and I knocked at the door. There was no answer.

"I must speak to you at once, Catarina," I called.

But still all was silent.

Then there was a groan in a deep voice.

"Alexandrov!" I said to my companion.

The door was a flimsy one, and in a trice the agent's burly shoulder had burst it in, and we entered.

We were only just in time.

Alexandrov lay on the bed, staring with eyes of fear at Catarina, who held the dagger in the folds of her dress, and had just awakened him.

She turned on us as we burst in, and had not my companion seized her arm the dagger would have been sheathed in Alexandrov's heart.

She was quivering with passion, and her lips trembled.

"I would have killed him. Why did you stop me? I had the right to. He killed my Gerard, and has lied to me. His life is mine, and I claim it. He crawled to me in the night, swearing the police had wounded him, and that if I did not succor him I should never be revenged. And all the time——" Here her fury broke all bounds. Wrenching herself free, she fought with us both, raving hysterically, as she tried to fix her hands on the throat of the maimed wretch, who shrank from her, and cried out to us to protect him.

We had to use no little force to get her out of the room.

Before we left the house we had his confession. He was so afraid of being left at Catarina's mercy, that I think he preferred to obtain the protection of the police by telling the truth.

He had always been jealous of Provost, and, meeting him at the railway-station on the night of his return from Belgrade, he had stalked him in the fog to my rooms in the Riessenstrasse. The place had been left open by my servants, who were in the pay of Lepova's agents, and he had followed Provost up to the flat, and stabbed him after a desperate quarrel.

Flying instantly, he had met me in the fog, and had taken me for the ghost of the man he had done to death—just as he had done that night in the gallery.

When Catarina, later, had shown him the dagger, he had understood his danger, and had put the thing on Dromach, and then, as I had already surmised, he had waited in the city for the abduction of Normia, which was to give him the money he needed to take Catarina away on an imaginary hunt after Dromach.

The failure of the abduction scheme left him without means to leave the city, and he had trusted to Stephanie to shield him, remaining at the Black House, while telling Catarina that he had had to fly. Learning the part I had played in the gallery scene, he had joined in the attack upon us to kill me in order to get rid of the evidence against him. He had been seriously injured in the fall from the balcony, but had succeeded in crawling to Catarina's house for shelter.

As soon as I had the story complete I hurried back with it to the minister, and that night started for Belgrade to explain matters and intercede for Normia.

To my consternation I found him in his hardest and severest mood.

"You are no longer in the employment of the government, Mr. Pershore," was his decision. "I see no palliation or excuse for your conduct. I desire to hear no explanation."

"You will surely listen to me!" I cried, and I gave him a circumstantial account of everything that had passed, dwelling in detail upon the facts of Normia's position.

"The so-called, or, rather, mis-called, Princess Normia has been guilty of an unforgivable crime, and she must take the consequences."

"But I assure you, on my honor, that she was forced into it," I protested.

He waved the protest aside as of no import.

"You are in love with the young woman, and are therefore no judge of her conduct. I warned you once before that you must choose between her and myself. You have now chosen."

"I don't care two straws about myself; but it is a rank injustice——"

"You are not the arbiter of justice in Servia, Mr. Pershore. It is lucky for the young woman that we have no Siberia. My advice to you is to return to your own country at once, marry, and stay at home. You understand your own people better than ours. When will you start?"

"I shall not go until I know that Normia——"

"When will you start, Mr. Pershore?"

"I'll be hanged if I leave Normia in the lurch like that!" I cried furiously.

There was just a flicker of the lids as the stern eyes were bent on me, and the cold, thin lips were pressed together tightly as he replied: "If you are here to-morrow you will be imprisoned. But I will spare you that. I will have you conducted across the frontier, and until you leave you will be under arrest. I will call your escort, whose life will depend upon seeing you out of the country." And he rose.

"I won't go. I swear to Heaven I won't! You can put me——" But he did not wait for the finish—did not even look round as he left the room.

Leave Normia in that scurvy fashion I would not for fifty governments, I swore to myself as I paced the room excitedly. Thank Heaven I had enough influence to back me in pleading her cause. He might put me across the frontier a hundred times, I would only

return. And, as for the escort—well, it would have to be a pretty strong one to——

And then I stopped abruptly, for the door opened gently, and the "escort", entered.

The whole malicious ingenuity of my old chief was laid bare on the instant.

I smiled. The smile broadened, and as I rushed and seized the "escort's" hands, there was an answering smile and a deep blush—the smile from eyes that were radiant with happiness.

"Are you the 'escort,' really?" I asked, scarcely able to believe it.

Normia nodded.

"He is a man of iron, that old chief of yours, but there is a flaw in some of the metal."

"In the heart, and you've melted it," I said, laughing.

She shook her head.

"No, no. But do you know my sentence?"

"No. But I know he has discharged me."

"I am banished; but—but only on condition," she cried, with lovely confusion.

I thought I could guess the wily old man's condition, and my heart leaped. But I assumed an expression of great anxiety.

"What is it?"

She smiled. We were quite close enough to one another then for me to read her expression easily.

"I believe you do know, Guy." And she blushed vividly.

"He is an old villain, if the mere thought of it makes you blush like that," I said, with much indignation. "But tell me."

"Everything is to be forgiven if—if I——" But she could not say it, and substituted: "If I don't come back."

I decided to be merciful.

"Are you to escort me all the way to England?"

"I—I suppose so." And her eyes danced merrily.

"How are you to come back?"

"I tell you I am not to come back at all. And he will have that clear before he lets me go at all."

"Have what clear?"

"Guy!"

"The old match-maker!" I laughed.

"There, you did know all the time! You see I can't help it, don't you?"

"Would you if you could?"

"He didn't give me the chance," she cried, with a side glance and a delicious grimace.

The chief came back then. He had evidently been listening.

"Well?" he asked.

"Yes, quite well. The best it could be, indeed. I am already under arrest."

"Umph!" he coughed dryly. "I thought you wouldn't stop here if this rebel was banished. That's why I discharged you."

"I wish to thank——"

"It wasn't kindness—only policy, boy. When she's married to you in England, she'll be too busy troubling you to trouble us out here. Now, escort, take the prisoner away. The rest of the party will join you at the train—your mother and sister, I mean."

The escort did a most unmilitary thing at that. Greatly to the grim old man's concern, a pair of white arms were thrown round his neck, and soft lips pressed kisses on his cheeks. And a sob was breaking in her voice as she cried: "How can I thank your excellency?"

He held her a moment, peering shrewdly into her eyes. "God bless you, child. You have had a narrower escape than even that man who was dead knows. Here, prisoner, take your escort away, or you'll see me make a fool of myself for a pretty girl's sake."

I believe it was many years since the hard old eyes had been so near to a suspicion of moisture as when he waved us out of the room.

We went, hand in hand, as befitted jailer and prisoner.

THE END.

The Adventures of Felix Boyd

By Scott Campbell
Author of "Below the Dead Line," Etc.

XXI.—AN ARTIST IN KNAVERY

(A Complete Story)

"NO, Cuthburt, there's nothing in that," declared Mr. Felix Boyd, with an emphatic shake of his head. "Supernatural agencies never receive the serious consideration of any intelligent detective, nor have they any place in his deductions. The mystery in which a crime may be involved is always susceptible to some rational explanation along perfectly natural lines, and what at first sight appears to be inexplicable may generally be traced to the perverted genius of some designing artist in knavery."

"In which case a genius in the detective line is required to solve the mystery, and that's why I've raced here after you—or that's one reason why," was the sharp retort.

"There is still another?" Boyd's brows arched.

"I wish to Heaven there wasn't!" Cuthburt blurted inelegantly. "I'd suffer the loss myself, in that case, and not open my mouth nor sweat a hair. To tell the truth, Mr. Boyd, I'm in a mighty awkward position."

He did not look like one who could easily be placed in an awkward position, this man who had hurried into Felix Boyd's office in Union Square that October morning, and plunged into his quite remarkable story with a haste and excitement that for a time precluded anything like an interruption. He was a tall, strikingly handsome man of forty, erect as an arrow, and set up like an athlete. Plainly enough, too, he was endowed with many of the mental as well as physical qualities that make a man noteworthy. He was a bond-broker, with an office in Broad Street and a handsome residence overlooking the Hudson.

Boyd had known him for years as a prosperous business man, a member of several of the best clubs, and a popular figure among the men about town. From his father, Amos Cuthburt had inherited a moderate fortune, which he had handled with tolerable success. He had married extremely well, and probably to much better advantage than if he had been of less attractive and distinguished appearance.

"I'll explain what I mean by an awkward position," he was about to resume, when Boyd checked him with a gesture.

"Stop a moment, Cuthburt. First let me be sure of the points you already have mentioned."

"Why can't you rehearse them on the way to my house? I've no mind to defer an investigation. My car is at the curb. We may waste valuable time——"

"I shall feel that I waste both time and energy if I start for your house before I know there is something to go for," Boyd dryly interrupted. "Sit down again and answer my questions. You say that your residence is protected with an electric burglar-alarm?"

There was no stirring Felix Boyd from his position, and Cuthburt nerv-

ously resumed the chair from which he had risen.

"Yes," said he. "Every available door and window."

"Are you sure, despite your absence from home last night, that the alarm was properly set and in perfect working order?"

"Absolutely sure. You know Jacobs, our butler. Twenty-eight years in our family, with never a slip of any kind. He always sets the alarm before going to bed, and he's as reliable as the polar star. He did so last evening, I have his word for it."

"Does any door or window appear to have been tampered with?"

"Not one."

"How about the upper windows?"

"There's no sign of a break, nor was any intruder heard in the upper rooms, all of which are occupied by the servants."

"Servants have a happy faculty for sleeping soundly—a luxury denied many a master and mistress," Boyd dryly observed. "Is your library safe a modern one?"

"Nearly new, and the best I could buy. I have a written guarantee that it is burglar-proof."

"And you are the only person, so far as you are aware, who knew the combination?"

"Exactly. I set the lock on new numbers after receiving the safe from the makers. I would have taken an oath that no other person was informed of them."

"Are you sure you scattered the combination when you last closed and locked the safe?"

"Yes, absolutely sure. That was only night before last."

"Yet, despite all this, the safe was opened last night and robbed," Boyd perplexedly remarked. "What do you think of it, Jimmie?"

The Central Office man, who had been silent up till then, smiled grimly, and shook his head. "Conundrum," he said tersely. "Give it up."

"It looks to me, Jimmie, as if some one in the house had got wise to the combination."

"Impossible!" Cuthburt quickly exclaimed.

"Why so?"

"Because I never have disclosed it."

"You may have talked in your sleep. Your wife may have heard you mention the numbers."

"Talk in my sleep be hanged! That's absurd."

"Not at all," Boyd insisted. "A man feeling that he alone knows a safe combination might very naturally mutter the numbers while dreaming."

"That's all nonsense," Cuthburt forcibly protested. "Even admitting that I may have done so, my wife surely would have informed me of the fact. Besides, it's not likely that my Geraldine would have opened the safe during my absence, to say nothing of prying open both interior drawers and removing a batch of bonds belonging to herself. That theory's absurd, Boyd. It hasn't feet to stand on."

"Possibly not," Boyd admitted. "The combination may have been discovered, then, by some person who has watched you open the safe."

"That also is out of the question," Cuthburt declared. "I never have opened it in the presence of another. I have made it a point never to do so. When I work at home evenings, I invariably lock myself alone in the library."

"You may have been watched through a keyhole, or some window."

"Impossible. The safe does not face any door or window from which the combination-dial can be seen."

"From a closet, then."

"There is no closet in the room."

"Nor any place of concealment?"

"None to which any sane person would resort with such a design."

"Humph!" grunted Boyd, with brows beginning to furrow. "It does look a bit odd, I'll confess. You said, I think, that only some bonds belonging to your wife were stolen. What was their value?"

"An even five thousand dollars."

"Did the safe contain no other valuables?"

"Nothing of value to crooks," Cuth-

Burt hastened to explain. "It contained an accumulation of important records and documents relating to family matters. I was the executor of my father's estate, also that of his brother, who died three years ago. When business is very good, however, I frequently bring packages of bonds or securities to the house, in order to work at home during the evening, instead of remaining at my office. Those, of course, are locked in the safe overnight."

"Have you recently done so?"

"Yes. Night before last. Luckily I returned them to my office-vault yesterday morning, or the thieves would have made a rich haul."

"Yes, yes, I see," nodded Boyd. "Who knew you returned them to your office, Cuthburt?"

"Only my wife, I think. I remember remarking to her that I should do so."

"By the way, speaking of your wife, how about her jewels? Aren't they usually kept in the safe?"

"Why, yes, of course," bowed Cuthburt. "But I gave them to her yesterday morning, that she might wear them to a ladies' club-dinner at Sherry's in the afternoon. They were locked in a desk in her chamber last night."

"Well, well, you appear to have been lucky in some respects," Boyd now cried, with a sudden vivacity that caused Coleman to open his eyes. "Now tell me, Mr. Cuthburt, what is the awkward position in which you are placed, to which you twice have referred?"

Cuthburt drew up his fine figure, and shook his head with a look of supreme disgust.

"It is due to the fact that I am carrying a ten-thousand-dollar insurance against burglary at my residence," he replied, with some asperity. "It's owing to that I'm in such a mess. I cannot possibly prove that I did not break into the house myself and commit the robbery. The extraordinary circumstances might, as you see, reasonably warrant such a suspicion."

"Well, yes, in a measure," smiled Boyd, while his eyes met those of the other with sharper scrutiny. "Really, Cuthburt, your precautions against burglary have been quite extravagant. Why did you take out such a policy in addition to protecting your residence with a burglar-alarm?"

"I didn't take it out," Cuthburt quickly declared. "I'd never have done that, for I have no liking for that sort of insurance."

"Yet you say you hold the policy."

"I took it only to oblige a fellow club-man, Tom Graydon, who held the policy, and was about to quit keeping house. He prevailed on me to take it off his hands at a reduced rate, the New York agent of the company, Jim Kinnicut, being willing to transfer it to me. I told Kinnicut at the time," Cuthburt bitterly rattled on, "that if a burglary was committed, it would be a hundred-to-one shot that the company would suspect me of committing the crime, or of abetting it, in order to get the insurance. And now here's a ripe, rosy chance for them to squeal against paying, and give my reputation a black eye at the same time."

"But where were you last night, Cuthburt, that you cannot prove yourself innocent of the burglary?" Boyd curiously demanded.

"That's just where the shoe pinches—and it pinches wofully hard," Cuthburt replied, with a dubious grimace. "I'll tell you the whole truth, Mr. Boyd, for by some hook or crook you must pull me out of this scrape. I am a dear lover of an occasional game of poker, a folly to which my wife is bitterly opposed. I have repeatedly assured her, shame upon me for it, that I never indulge in the vice since our marriage; yet now and then, merely to renew agreeable associations, I do go so far to the bad as to sit in with a few old friends. You know, Boyd, what that means—a night out."

"Yes, very likely," Boyd dryly admitted.

"On such occasions I am obliged to frame up a plausible story for Dolly—that's Geraldine—merely to explain my absence and relieve her of jealous misgivings," Cuthburt continued. "She is dreadfully afflicted in that way, yet without the slightest occasion. On my

word, Boyd, I love her far too dearly to give her reasonable cause for jealousy; yet the green-eyed monster nips her very, very hard at times, I am sorry to say. For these reasons I now am placed in a position——"

"Where are your poker friends with whom you passed the night?" Boyd demanded. "Surely they can convince Kinnicut that you did not commit the burglary."

"If that were so it would be all right," groaned Cuthburt, a picture of despair. "But there was no poker party. I had been misinformed."

"Oh, I see!"

"Yet I had told Dolly that I must go to Philadelphia, and could not possibly return until this morning. I hated to go home with another lie, so I took in the vaudeville, and then sauntered the streets until midnight, cursing my folly, and finally slept at the club."

"You met nobody there?"

"Not a soul. The house was deserted, and I departed this morning before the janitor arrived. I had my breakfast down-town, and then went to my office, where I afterward was telephoned of the robbery. You now must see how I am placed. If Kinnicut investigates this burglary and thinks it off color, of which there is no reasonable doubt, he will require an explanation from me. Yet in no way can I make good—absolutely none! I shall be done brown by the circumstances. And the worst of it is—by far the worst—my wife must learn of my duplicity. I'd sooner have lost a hand. To a woman of her jealous temperament, the circumstances can have only one infernal interpretation. On the level, Boyd, I would rather suffer all the losses involved, every dollar, than afflict her with the pangs and suspicions that now appear inevitable."

The Central Office man was inclined to laugh. The curious complexity of the case, with the delicate situation evolved, tickled his sense of humor, despite the aspect of the victim of these circumstances. For Cuthburt now sat bolt upright in his chair, his hands gripping his knees, his jaws hard set, his fine face sickly pale and sprinkled from brow to chin with tiny, glistening drops. A picture of heart-racked distress and genuine remorse.

Felix Boyd measured the man correctly—an impulsive, lovable, whole-souled fellow, in reality, with just enough fondness for the spice of life to have gone a little astray; and, on the other hand, possessed of a love, loyalty, and devotion ready to sacrifice a small fortune to turn from the heart he loved this single arrow barbed with his own folly.

Boyd saw far more than this, in fact; and there was no smile lurking in his eyes nor about the corners of his sharply chiseled lips. He looked as grim as a sphinx when, drawing forward in his chair, he said curtly:

"I'll do what I can for you, Cuthburt. Plainly enough, a crime has been committed; and, to save you, which you don't quite deserve, it must be placed where it belongs. Yet I'll attempt it for you," added Boyd, while he sprang up and took his hat. "We'll go to your house at once. Have you notified Kinnicut of the robbery?"

"I tried to do so by telephone, but only a clerk was in his office, who promised to give him my message the moment he came in. Then I hastened here after you, thinking your presence at my house would be a point in my favor."

"Very good. We may reach there before him. Come with us, Jimmie. Lead the way, Cuthburt, and tell your man to ignore the speed-limit."

Jimmie Coleman was some surprised by Boyd's sudden energetic interest in the case. He glanced furtively at his clouded face while descending the corridor stairs, but could make nothing of it, and finally growled:

"Seems to me you've cut loose all of a sudden. What do you see in the blooming case, anyway?"

"The hand of an artist in knavery," Boyd replied, with a shrug. "You don't, eh? Nor anything under the surface? Well, well, you soon will—providing I can find it. Take my word for it, Jimmie, you soon—— Ah, the chauffeur is waiting."

Boyd merely glanced at the face of a tall, wiry, clean-built fellow of twenty-five, who was about to step into the big touring-car. It was a keen, strong, smoothly shaven face, as thin as that of a trained athlete, and was lighted by a pair of steel-blue eyes, as penetrating as needles. Coleman felt himself thrust to the rear seat with Cuthburt, while Boyd sprang up to the remaining one in front.

"All ready, chauffeur!" he said crisply. "Let her——"

"Stillman, sir!" The voice that interrupted was as cold and metalliclike as the fellow's eyes, yet irresistibly indifferent.

"Let her go, Mr. Stillman." Boyd accepted the correction with a nod and smile.

As the car shot away from the curbing and sped across Union Square, he turned back to Cuthburt and asked:

"At what time were you informed of the burglary?"

"About half-past nine."

"It now is nearly eleven. Did you go home immediately?"

"Yes. I remained only to hurriedly look around, however, and gave Jacobs instructions that nothing should be disturbed."

"Quite right," Boyd nodded. "I infer, by the way, that you have entire confidence in all of your servants—begging your pardon, Mr. Stillman."

"I am not one of the house servants, sir."

"Certainly I have," cried Cuthburt. "I know all of them to be trustworthy."

"You don't live with Mr. Cuthburt, eh?" Boyd lightly queried, reverting to the chauffeur.

"I am employed by Mr. Cuthburt. I room in the stable."

"Ah, I see." Boyd smiled, with lids drooping. "That is what you meant by not being one of the house servants. I did not quite catch your meaning—at first."

"I meant only what I said, sir; that I'm not employed in the house."

"Certainly, certainly, I understand," nodded Boyd. "Were you in and out of the stable last night?"

"Until I went to bed."

"About what time?"

"Maybe ten o'clock. It might have been eleven."

"You saw nobody, I infer, about the house or in the grounds?"

"Nobody; that's right."

"Nor did you hear—steady!" Boyd half-started from his seat as the swiftly moving car turned a corner. "By Jove! you have splendid nerve, Mr. Stillman, or you could not skin a curbing in that fashion without so much as a glance at it."

For the first time the penetrating blue eyes of the chauffeur came round to meet those of Felix Boyd.

"Habit, sir," he replied. "You get used to a car when you run it daily. Yet as for nerve"—the fellow's thin lips curled slightly, something between a smile and sneer—"I reckon I've got as much nerve as most men. Maybe more!"

II.

A huge double house of brownstone, with a wall enclosing both, with a sweep of velvety lawn fronting them, with a broad grill gate at either entrance, with a single attractive stable well to the rear, with a hundred-yard declivity making down toward the steep bank of the Hudson, then gleaming in the noonday sunlight, a sheen of blue marred by many moving crafts of every description—these were the main features that caught Boyd's eye as the car entered the driveway gate of one of the dwellings.

"You did not tell me, Cuthburt, that your house was semidetached," he remarked.

"It did not occur to me. What does it signify, since I own both, and there is no connection between them?"

"One appears to be vacant."

"It is vacant, and has been for six months, I'm sorry to say," Cuthburt replied, with a grimace.

"Does your burglar-alarm include both houses?"

"Certainly not. What need of that?"

"Any agile crook," Boyd said, with

a shrug, "might reach your upper windows from those of the vacant house."

"But all of my upper rooms are occupied each night, or, if not——"

"Ah, well, it doesn't matter," Boyd interrupted, as he sprang from the car at a side door. "I may wish to enter the vacant house, however, after inspecting your library."

An elderly butler in black opened the door to admit them. The chauffeur sped away with the car. Boyd appeared oblivious to his departure. While passing through the dim, stately hall into which he was led, he caught sight of several servants, or their heads, thrust from divers discreet vantage-places—two chambermaids on the stairs, a table girl at the dining-room door, the capped crown of a chef at that of the kitchen.

"Ah, Jacobs, I've met you before," he said genially. "You remember, perhaps."

"I do, Mr. Boyd, sir." The butler bowed punctiliously, while his fund of wrinkles took on new directions and mapped a smile on his aged face. "'Twas in the days of the old master, sir, God keep him!"

"Amen to that, Jacobs! You may, if you will, summon all of the servants into the hall. I may wish to question them."

"I'll speak to my wife," murmured Cuthburt.

Felix Boyd did not appear to hear him. His smile had become a frown. He had reached the door of a handsomely furnished library, and his eyes were taking on the gleam and glitter Coleman knew so well. He swept the room with lightning glances, noting the shelved walls, the draped windows, the open safe, the drawers and documents strewing a superb tiger-skin rug lying before it.

"H'm, not so bad, Jimmie, not so bad," he muttered; Coleman was at his elbow. "Yet there should be some clue, some clue to our quarry. Some clue unless I'm all at sea and——"

"What the dickens——"

"Stop a bit!" Boyd muttered, and gazed, but had not moved.

"Here are the servants, if you wish to question——"

"Pshaw! I have no use for them. Hold your tongue, Jimmie, and let them remain. We'll soon learn how, and possibly who——"

"Pardon me, Boyd," Cuthburt spoke from the hall. "Have you ever met my wife? Allow me, Dolly, dear, to present Mr. Felix Boyd. He has consented to investigate the robbery. Detective Coleman, also, of the Central Office."

Coleman bowed, and drew aside. His grim face was a picture of irritating perplexity. He was asking himself if it was for this Boyd had been waiting, why he had summoned the servants into the hall, and at what on earth he was driving. For his life the Central Office man could see nothing extraordinary in the case.

Boyd had stepped back into the hall to meet the graceful, dignified woman who advanced to meet him. He often had heard of her rare beauty; yet her finely cut, regular features, her lofty brow, and radiant dark eyes, her firm mouth and rounded chin—these were not what impressed him most during the first formalities. What he chiefly noticed was—that her clear, velvety cheeks were colorless, though she was outwardly composed and smiling graciously.

"I shall do all I can with the case, Mrs. Cuthburt, I assure you," he said, after their greeting.

"That is very good of you, Mr. Boyd," she replied, still smiling. Then, with a deprecatory little shrug: "If you fail, however, really there's not so very much involved in it."

"Humph!" Cuthburt blurted. "Five thousand is not to be sneezed at, Dolly."

"It might have been ten, my dear."

"Oh, I don't mean that it will cripple us; far from it."

"Hardly, love. Besides, only think how much worse it might have been. Suppose my jewels had been in the safe, and your bonds of the previous night."

"Don't speak of it, for that would be too—yes, yes, go ahead, Boyd. Begin at once, if you like, and command me."

Boyd had signified his intentions, with a bow, and again entered the library. With a glance at Coleman, whose perplexity he presently redoubled, he quickly knelt at the safe and began to manipulate the combination-knob, with his ear pressed to the door near the dial.

"You're right, Cuthburt, about this safe," he presently cried, so loudly that Coleman was startled. "No expert crook can have opened it by listening to the lock-tumblers. They're as noiseless as shadows. In some way your head has been robbed of the combination, as the safe since has been robbed of your wife's bonds."

"But——"

"Never mind—we'll soon learn how," Boyd quickly added. "Don't interrupt me nor get in my way. Anywhere on that side of the table. You'll pardon my bruskness, I'm sure. It's a failing of mine when at work. Notice these inner drawers, Jimmie. Both were pried open with—ah, here it is under the rug. A steel jimmy, old chap, as sure as you're a foot high. Looks like a professional job, eh? In part, at least."

Talking rapidly, moving eagerly, each moment appearing more absorbed, more confident, more intensely in earnest, yet with seldom a glance for any of his hearers except Coleman, though all now had ventured into the room or were grouped on the threshold of the door, Felix Boyd now was fairly launched into one of those weird exhibitions of his genius that never failed to amaze and mystify every observer, not excepting the one close friend who best knew him and his methods.

"It must be the work of professionals, Mr. Boyd, I'm sure," Mrs. Cuthburt said confidently, from a position near the door.

"Yes, yes, no doubt of it."

"No novice could have accomplished it."

"Surely not. Your bonds, Mrs. Cuthburt, were they in one of the drawers?"

"Yes, sir, the lower one."

"Ah, I see," cried Boyd; not once had he looked at her. "Probably the last opened by the rascals. Notice this mud on the rug, Jimmie. Yellow mud that may have been tracked in here."

He whipped out a lens from his pocket and fell flat on the rug to examine one of the yellow spots.

"Shall I put up the car, Mr. Cuthburt?" Stillman, cap in hand, had wormed his way into the room.

"Not yet, James."

While her husband replied, Mrs. Cuthburt glanced at the thin, keen face of the chauffeur, then changed her position for one nearer the window.

"Well, well, what do you make of it?" Coleman impatiently muttered, for Boyd's eyes appeared to be roving.

Now he sprang to his feet, however, saying quickly:

"I want a towel, napkin, or something white—hold, this will do!" He seized a newspaper from the table and spread it on the floor. "I want this rug shaken. Lay hold, Jimmie. Lend a hand here, Stillman, like a good fellow. Gently now, and over the paper. I wish to examine some of the sand, or dirt, left by the boots of these nighthawks. That will do—thank you, Stillman."

"Glad to be of any service, sir."

The cold, metallic voice of this young man of nerve had not varied in tone or inflection.

"Ah, here we have it, Jimmie!" Boyd was off again like a hound that has caught his breath, crouching above the paper with his lens, and enunciating each jerky phrase as if impelled by the force of some new and startling discovery. "Specks of coal-dust, Jimmie. About what I expected. Point to the cellar, eh? That's right, old chap. We'll track the rascals yet—presently—presently!"

He was up again in a moment, and startled every observer by hurriedly closing the safe doors. Then he dropped to his knees, crouching until the back of his head touched the combination-dial; in which amazing attitude, looking fairly weird and wild with his hawklike face and gleaming eyes, he fell to glancing swiftly toward every point of the room.

Presently his glance fell—yet not for the first time, by any means—upon the

iron filigree of a furnace-register in one of the near walls. He reached it with a bound, with a cry of almost delirious satisfaction, and opened the shutters.

"Here we have it—the cat in the meal, Jimmie!" he fairly shouted. "Note the height, the direction, the distance. Wait here, old chap! I'll have a look at the pipes. The cellar, Cuthburt—I wish to go down cellar."

Cuthburt, blank with amazement, sprang up to conduct him. His wife, with a tinge of red suddenly dispelling her paleness and a swift gleam of satisfaction leaping up in her splendid eyes, laughed audibly, a quick, nervous laugh, and hastened to cry:

"Dear me, Mr. Boyd, your work is amazing. You fairly thrill one with your sensational efforts. I never dreamt of anything like it. I must see more of it—lead the way, Stillman, and switch on the lights! You can move more quickly than Jacobs."

"Certainly, madam, certainly. I'm glad to be of service." Stillman's voice had a sharper ring, a more eager intonation.

Felix Boyd appeared deaf to the voice, blind to the looks, of either. As if in a fever of excitement, with his features still grimly set and eyes aglow, he hurried from the room after Stillman, followed by Cuthburt and his wife, and passed through the hall and down the stairs to a broad cellar.

There he saw at a glance that the house had once been heated with a furnace, and that steam heat subsequently had been adopted. The old furnace and the glistening tin pipes never had been removed, however, and Boyd quickly located the one that crooked upward through the floor to the library register. About six feet from the crook was a joint in the huge pipe, and to this he eagerly hastened.

"Help me once more, Stillman, like a good fellow," he cried heartily.

"Yes, sir, surely." Stillman's icy reserve had entirely vanished; his eagerness was equally pronounced. "What shall I do, sir?"

"I wish to part this joint," cried Boyd, reaching up to the pipe, which was nearly as high as the ceiling, from which it was supported by wires at intervals.

"Do you want any tools or——"

"No, no, get me something to stand on—ah, here's a soap box. Just the thing."

"Let me help——"

"Wait a bit! The joint parts easily—just as I thought," Boyd declared, as he swung one portion of the pipe aside to enable him to peer into that leading to the library.

"Good heavens! What on earth——" Cuthburt began a question; but it was cut short by a sudden exultant cry from Felix Boyd.

"Eureka! I've found it, Cuthburt. Here's all there is to it, my man," he announced more calmly.

"What have you found, sir?" Stillman ventured, while the others drew nearer and stared.

"A mirror in the pipe—two mirrors, if I'm not mistaken," said Boyd. "Yes, yes, there are two. Here are the strings by which they may be operated."

"Mirrors!" gasped Cuthburt perplexedly.

"Zounds, man! don't you see the design?" demanded Boyd, with a growl that resented such blindness. "One mirror is above the crook in the pipe and directly back of your library register. The lower one is where the pipe bends, and it may be seen from this opening. Plainly enough, Cuthburt, they have been cleverly adjusted on pivots in the pipe, and may be moved by these strings. When at proper angles, or so that the mirror seen from here catches the reflection of the one above, a person may stand here, and, in effect, gaze through your library register."

"Good heavens, Boyd, you astound me!"

"The register, moreover, is only a few feet from your safe," Boyd quickly added; "and it is so situated that the front of the safe should be easily seen from here. We can readily ascertain. Hello, Jimmie!"

Boyd's voice was easily heard through the pipe, and that of the Central Office man quickly responded.

"Hello! What do you want, Felix?"

"Is the register open?"

"Yes, just as you left it."

"Throw the beam of your flash-light into it, Jimmie."

Boyd waited for a moment, still peering into the pipe. Presently a bright ray of light confirmed his statements. It shot down through the pipe, and plainly revealed, not only the lower mirror, but also the reflection of the register in the one above it.

"There it is, sir! I can see a light!" Stillman quickly exclaimed, as if struck with wonderment by the ingenious contrivance.

"Yes, Stillman, so can I," Boyd rejoined, with subtle dryness. "All right, Jimmie! Now stand away from the register and have the draperies parted at both windows. I want more light in the library."

"I understand!" shouted Coleman. "Half a second."

"I think, Cuthburt, that we then shall be able to see—ah, yes, as plainly as one could wish."

"See what, Boyd? You don't mean to——"

"I mean the dial on the safe door," Boyd interrupted, still gazing into the pipe. "In the evening, moreover, when the electric lamps are lighted, it could be seen far more plainly, even the notches on its edge. How simple a scheme, yet how clever! Given either two numbers of a combination, Cuthburt, the third may be easily found. After standing here to watch you open the safe a few times, and to note exactly where you stopped, the dial on each of the last two numbers, any keen-eyed crook, manipulating the dial himself, could soon arrive at the entire combination by trying each number for a starter. It would require a little time and patience, nothing more. That's all there was to it, Cuthburt. That's how your head was robbed of the combination. Have a look for yourself, sir."

"By Jove, this astounds me!" Cuthburt cried, while he hastened to comply. "Yet not more than the genius that so quickly could discover it."

"But how, Mr. Boyd," cried Mrs. Cuthburt—"how was it possible for a crook to repeatedly enter our cellar, even our library, in order to adjust that contrivance in the pipe, watch my husband open the safe, and finally do so himself? It seems incredible that——"

"That I should have solved only one-half of the mystery, Mrs. Cuthburt?" Boyd interrupted her with an apologetic bow and a quizzical light in his inscrutable gray eyes. He observed that hers were bright, that the tinge of red had deepened in her cheeks, and that her perplexity, profound though it appeared, was not sufficient to entirely obscure her feeling of relief. His own intense eagerness had vanished. He appeared as if he already had reached the goal he had been seeking.

"Well, perhaps," Mrs. Cuthburt smiled approvingly; "I should have said that."

"And I, perhaps, found in the library a clue to the other half of the mystery," Boyd quietly laughed. "We will see if I am right. Where is the coal-bin? Ah, here we have it."

"Coal-bin, Mr. Boyd?"

"Empty, too, I perceive, and that it is built against the wall that divides the two houses," said Boyd, while he lifted out the sliding door of a high wooden bin near one corner of the cellar.

"What have you discovered there?" cried Cuthburt, hastening to join him.

"The avenue, I think, by which your burglar-alarm was evaded," Boyd replied, crouching to gaze into the bin. "Yes, indeed, I am right."

"Good heavens, Boyd, you don't mean it?"

"See for yourself, Cuthburt. Several stones have been removed from the wall, leaving an opening between the two cellars. You have had a frequent visitor in your vacant house, one who has taken his own time, when the opportunities presented, to deliberately pave the way for this burglary. Instead of your upper windows, the rascal has availed himself of your basement."

"By Jove! we'll go in there and see what we can find," cried Cuthburt, starting for the stairs.

"A waste of time," Boyd laughed de-

risively. "You probably would find a vacant chair in the cellar, a convenient window cleverly forced, some bits of moldy food lying around, tokens of prolonged vigils, some scatterings of tobacco and matches here and there, and very likely—ah, but what matters? You would find, Cuthburt, only—what the rascal has left."

Stillman laughed.

"I reckon that's right, sir," he ventured, with his sharp eyes meeting Boyd's. "You've found the way and the means, sir, that's sure. But to find the crook——"

"That's quite another matter, eh?" Boyd interrupted, with a dry chuckle. "Right you are, Stillman, my good fellow, perfectly right. I guess our hunt ends here for the present."

"It looks so, sir, for fair."

Boyd glanced furtively at Cuthburt's face while they mounted the stairs. It reflected an inexpressible relief—he was thinking of Kinnicut, and how easily he now could, with Boyd's assistance, convince him that the burglary was perfectly genuine.

"Don't mind the loss, Dolly, dear," he was fondly saying.

"Oh, I don't mind it, love, not in the least, if you don't." Mrs. Cuthburt appeared as relieved as her husband.

"It is more than covered, by the way, Dolly—something I have not yet told you—by an insurance policy against burglary here, which I recently obtained from—ah, here's Kinnicut now!"

They had arrived in the hall, and the disclosure Cuthburt was making was completed by another—a tall, cadaverous gentleman whom Jacobs had admitted a few moments before, and who bowed agreeably while he approached.

"Glad to see you, Cuthburt," he said suavely. "You are lucky, indeed, to have taken that ten thousand dollar insurance off Graydon's hands. It will help you out in this affair. Let me congratulate you."

They stood shaking hands, both laughing heartily.

Two persons only observed the woman near-by—the chauffeur and Felix Boyd.

"Insurance—insurance!"

Her lips were moving, yet not a sound came from them. They had turned as gray as ashes. The last sign of color had left her cheeks. Her splendid eyes, radiant a moment before, now were twin mirrors of consuming dread and dismay. Without a word, stealthily, silently, with her jeweled hand touching the wall for support, she moved away and hurried up the stairs.

Mr. Felix Boyd saw her from the corner of his eye, yet apparently had not observed her. Within half a second Stillman's voice sounded at his elbow.

"I'll bring the car, sir, if you wish to go."

"You might have it ready, Stillman, my good fellow." Boyd turned to him with a smile. "I shall not remain long unless Cuthburt wants something more."

"I'll go get her ready at once."

Boyd glanced after him, as he moved away and disappeared in the side hall; then at Cuthburt, stalking into the library with his companion. Unobserved, with a sudden intense glow lighting his eyes, Boyd stepped quietly to the foot of the stairs—then darted up after the woman.

III.

There is no telling which way a startled cat will jump. What a woman will do under strenuous circumstances, or under the impulse of aggravated passions, is equally problematical. It required a man of Felix Boyd's keen discernment to see why Mrs. Amos Cuthburt had left the lower hall so abruptly, ghastly with sudden dismay, and sought the solitude of her chamber. She no sooner had entered it, however, than Boyd's tall figure appeared at the open door.

"I beg your pardon," he said blandly. "I want a few words with you alone, Mrs. Cuthburt."

The woman turned, as if struck with a whip.

"You—you, Mr. Boyd!" she ex-

claimed, white with resentment. "How dare you come here?"

"I would dare much more for a woman in distress," Boyd gently answered. "I have come here only to serve you."

"Serve me, sir?"

"And, if possible, save you."

"Save me!" She echoed his words with the fire dying from her frowning eyes and with lips twitching nervously.

"Yes, precisely, Mrs. Cuthburt, if it can be done."

There was no sign of austerity in the fine face of Mr. Felix Boyd. It wore an expression of gentleness, solicitude, and compassion that told as plainly as words what his mission meant.

She stared at him in silence for a moment, trembling visibly, then faltered: "I don't know what you mean, sir."

"On the contrary, Mrs. Cuthburt, you know precisely what I mean," Boyd blandly insisted, and stepped into the room. "Don't resent my presumption, for a friend in need is a friend worth having. What I already know of this affair is not in your favor, Mrs. Cuthburt, yet I feel very sure that the truth from you would shed an entirely different light upon it. What has that crafty rascal Stillman been doing, to get you into such a mess as this?"

"You—you don't mean that you suspect me of——"

"Of knowing all about this absurd burglary—why, why, of course," Boyd lightly asserted. "Don't let me alarm you, however. It has been obvious to me from the first."

"But you said down-stairs——"

"Oh, that was said only to blind others until I could see you alone," Boyd dryly interrupted. "I'm likely to do or say anything when an occasion requires it. Come, come, Mrs. Cuthburt, pull yourself together and tell me the truth."

There is a grief too poignant for tears, a distress too terrible for words. Boyd never had seen so agonized a face as that of the woman to whom he was speaking, yet her glittering eyes were dry and burning as if with fever. She had reeled a little under his accusation, overwhelmed for a moment, only to grasp at a chair for support while she steadied her quaking nerves.

"I should do your genius an injustice, Mr. Boyd, if I were to deny what you allege," she said, with a composure given the lie by her ghastly aspect. "If you know so much, however, you should also know that I have come here only to——"

"Only to confess to your husband what you could not possibly confess in the presence of others," Boyd again interposed. "I should be blind, indeed, if I had not seen that. The burglary insurance, of which you were ignorant, suddenly placed you in an unexpected position, I judge. Does it make you a criminal, when you intended only—— Come, come, Mrs. Cuthburt, let me be the one to set you right."

"My husband——" Mrs. Cuthburt appeared on the verge of fainting. "Call him here, I implore you. I will confess all."

"To him—nonsense!" Boyd tersely interrupted, quickly shaking his head. "That's the very worst thing you could do. I'll not allow you to make such a mistake."

"Mistake!"

"You already have been at a great sacrifice to hide the truth from him. There must be a very good reason, then, for keeping him still in the dark, as well as for your own strange conduct. Very possibly, Mrs. Cuthburt, I may be able to accomplish what you have vainly attempted. There still may be a way to hide an exposure which, for his sake and your own——"

"No, no, that now is impossible."

"I don't know the word."

"I am in the power of another, one who——"

"Then I'll very soon have him in mine," Boyd quickly declared. "Time is of value, however, and if I am to be of any service to you——"

"Wait—wait!"

Mrs. Cuthburt ran to the door and closed it. Some of the old light was in her eyes, and with the revival of a hope that had died in her breast only a few moments before tears began to

flood them, and she gave way to her agitation. When she reverted to Boyd she was trembling from head to foot, and was shaken with welling sobs.

"Do you mean that you—that you will befriend me in this way?" she asked, with piteous eagerness.

"I am here only for that. If for Cuthburt's sake, or your own——"

"For his sake—for his only I would hide the truth," she interrupted. "If it can be done—oh, Mr. Boyd, if it still can be done, I would sacrifice anything I possess to spare him the knowledge of my folly, my shame, my humiliation. If it can be done——"

"The truth—that may enable me to do it."

"I will tell you all."

"Haste is imperative. You knew of this burglary?"

"Yes, yes, all about it! I suffered it to be planned."

"But with what object? For what reason?"

"Lack of reason—my own!" Mrs. Cuthburt bitterly confessed, amid sobs and tears she vainly strove to govern. "I have been a senseless, suspicious, jealous fool—oh, Mr. Boyd, I blush with shame to confess it!"

"But why this robbery—keep to the point," Boyd curtly commanded.

"I never intended there should be any robbery," Mrs. Cuthburt tearfully protested. "I was duped, deceived, victimized by a rascal, until I found myself helpless. Since the day of my marriage, Mr. Boyd, I have been the victim of a foolish, insane jealousy, which——"

"Which Stillman has taken advantage of?"

"Yes, yes, though I did not dream of it until last night. You know to what jealousy may drive a woman, and to what extent one may be thrown in with her coachman or chauffeur. This gave that evil miscreant the opportunities he wanted. He began with vague hints reflecting upon my husband's conduct, hints that I should have ignored, yet to which I foolishly listened. He became bolder when he saw their effect upon me. He duped me so artfully that, instead of resenting his outrageous presumption, I became an easy victim to his guile."

"Be as brief as possible," suggested Boyd. "Come to the facts bearing upon this robbery."

"To do more than that, to tell you how he for weeks has led me on in this way, would require hours, and a confession of a weakness on my part and artfulness on his that would appear incredible," Mrs. Cuthburt bitterly added. "About a week ago, Mr. Boyd, after pledging me to secrecy, he declared that he knew our library safe contained letters to my husband that would confirm the scandalous stories he had imposed upon me."

"Ah, now I see!" muttered Boyd inaudibly.

"That he had told the truth," Mrs. Cuthburt tearfully proceeded, "appeared in that my husband never would tell me the safe-combination. My jealousy, misgivings, and secret resentment were then redoubled. I was half-crazed to open the safe, to confirm my suspicions, but I told Stillman that I did not know the combination. He then said that he would open it for me, with my assistance; that he knew a way by which the combination could be discovered. He required only that I should assign work to the other servants that would take them out of hearing of what he must do in the two cellars."

"In a nutshell," Boyd interposed—"he told you he would contrive to open the safe only to show you the letters mentioned."

"Yes, Mr. Boyd, that was all I expected."

"And the safe then was to be closed and left as before?"

"Really, sir, that was all I intended."

"Was any time set for opening it?"

"The first night Mr. Cuthburt should be absent from home."

"So Stillman opened it last night, eh?"

"Yes."

"Were you present?"

"I was. I joined him in the library at midnight."

"You found no letters there, as he predicted, did you?"

"No, no, Mr. Boyd, I did not. But I then learned for the first time——" Mrs. Cuthburt hesitated, with eyes drooping, with cheeks suddenly suffused, with sobs breaking again from her tremulous lips.

"Learned what?" inquired Boyd, with brows knitting.

"The true design with which that miscreant had imposed upon me."

"Not with designs upon you, upon your love——"

"Yes—yes!"

"Good God!" Boyd's face grew hard as flint. "The cur—the servile cur! Be quick—what more?" he commanded.

"I was overwhelmed with rage and indignation," said Mrs. Cuthburt, sobbing bitterly. "I ordered him to close the safe and leave the house. He laughed at me, scorned my threats, and declared I was in the same boat with him. With a tool he had brought, he then forced open the inner drawers of the safe and took out my bonds, saying he would have them at least to pay for his trouble. In a way I was powerless. I dared not call the other servants. Having learned the truth, that my past suspicions were groundless, and realizing the dreadful nature of my own shameful transgression, I then had only one hope—that I could hide the truth from my husband and spare him any knowledge of my unworthy distrust. I determined to let Stillman keep my bonds, providing he also would keep my secret. He declared that he would, that none would suspect the truth, that the crime would be regarded as a genuine burglary, and that he had taken every precaution to make sure of that."

Boyd abruptly checked her. With lips drawn and an ugly blaze in his frowning eyes, he stepped into the hall and glanced over the baluster-rail. Wondering at his absence, the Central Office man had left the library and was gazing out of the front door. Boyd called down to him in a sharp whisper, leaning over the rail, then significantly touched his wrists with his fingers.

"That chauffeur, Jimmie," he cried softly. "Get away with him on the quiet. I think you'll find him in the stable. On the quiet, mind you, and give him no chance to bolt."

Coleman nodded understandingly, despite his perplexity, then left the house by the front door.

Boyd listened for a moment, making sure that Cuthburt still was in the library, then hastily returned to the chamber. He found Mrs. Cuthburt awed and trembling near one of the windows.

"What have you done?" she cried hopelessly, when he entered. "Oh, Mr. Boyd, you now can accomplish nothing. The existence of the burglary insurance makes it impossible. Call my husband and let me tell him the truth."

"Truth be hanged!" Boyd spoke with a threatening snarl. "There's nothing in that. What good to make you two miserable? I want only the criminal, not his dupe. Not a word of this to Cuthburt as long as you live. I'll soon set you right if—where are those bonds?"

"Stillman has them." The reply came with a shivering gasp.

"That cur must be muzzled, then," snapped Boyd. "That done and the bonds recovered, this burglary insurance may be set aside and the whole matter adjusted without any disclosures."

"Is it possible?" Mrs. Cuthburt was transfigured in an instant. "Oh, Mr. Boyd, if that can only be done——"

"Leave it to me. It shall be done, all right, providing Coleman gets away with his man without—— Oh, by thunder, it's all off! The rascal is bolting!"

Boyd had caught sight of him through one of the side windows—a figure that was darting like a frightened fox across the slope of lawn back of the stable, crouching while he ran, keen to elude observation, and making at the top of his speed down the long decline terminating at the steep bank of the river.

Boyd needed no explanation of the rascal's sudden precipitous flight. He knew that he must have seen Coleman approaching the stable, that he had guessed with what object, no doubt suspecting that Mrs. Cuthburt had weak-

ened and confessed, and that he at once had made tracks out of the rear door.

Recalling Cuthburt's dilemma, his remorseful appeal of that morning, the pitiable situation of his duped and grief-stricken wife, the sacrifice each had been eager to make for the other, the domestic breach that might follow exposure—one thought of these, and of the scurvy cur then turning tail after his foul work, was enough to rouse the devil in Boyd's aggressive nature.

The look that leaped to his face at that moment appalled the woman. She recoiled with a gasp, then was brushed rudely aside, while he cried half in his throat, as he ran to the window and threw it open:

"Not a word! Remember—not a word!"

To have used the stairs was to have lost sight of his quarry. Boyd sprang to the window-sill, leaped to a portico over the side door of the house, and in another moment was sprawling on the gravel driveway ten feet below. Up in an instant, with teeth hard set, with every nerve tingling, a devil in the determination that now possessed him, he tore across the lawn in pursuit of Stillman, who then was disappearing below the sharp brink of the bluff above the river.

He covered the hundred yards in record time, and then discovered Stillman running toward a narrow stone landing at which a small naphtha-launch belonging to Cuthburt was lying, evidently bent upon escaping across the river. The rascal caught sight of Boyd at the same moment, as the latter plunged down the steep path from the bluff, and greeted his appearance with a defiant yell. With a small leather bag in one hand, which Boyd rightly inferred contained the stolen bonds, he darted out on the landing and tossed the bag on board the launch, a narrow twenty-footer with a torpedo-stern, obviously built for speed. To cast off a bow-line, then shove the boat's nose from the landing and leap on board, required hardly a moment.

Boyd saw that the crafty rascal already had prepared for this speedy departure, also that his escape appeared highly probable; for the only other craft then in that part of the river was a laboring tug, nearly in mid-stream, with a long, deeply laden barge in tow. Sprinting madly toward the landing, which was somewhat removed from the path down the bluff, Boyd felt for his revolver.

"Hold on, there, Stillman!" he bellowed, while he ran. "I'll drop you with a bullet if you start that boat. Quit, or I'll shoot."

"Shoot, and be damned." Stillman's head bobbed for an instant above the boat's rail, then as quickly disappeared.

He was crouching above the fly-wheel, fiercely gripping the crank, and saw that Boyd still was thirty yards from the edge of the landing. By sheer good luck he got the ignition with the first turn of the wheel, and a swirl of dark water surged out from under the low, white stern of the swinging boat. She made way instantly, and Stillman, still crouching out of range of a bullet, darted forward to grasp the wheel.

Boyd then was bolting across the landing at the top of his speed. He saw the launch start, saw her veer into the stream, caught barely a glimpse of Stillman as flat as a flounder under the wheel he was gripping with one uplifted hand; and then he saw the sweep of the boat's stern nearer the landing, as she sped in a sharp arc from the shore.

Most men would have hesitated, would have shrunk from a leap of a dozen feet, with only the treacherous edge of a boat's after-deck for a landing-point. To shrink at such a time, however, was not in the make-up of Felix Boyd. He dropped his revolver into his pocket, caught his breath for the bound, then cleared, with a flying leap, the span of swirling water—and missed the boat's edge by at least a foot.

With a crash that shook every timber of the launch, however, he struck the long torpedo-stern, then snatched wildly at the rail as he fell, only to get a grip with his left hand around a vertical pennant-socket that protruded a few inches above the deck abaft the rail.

To this he fiercely clung, dragging astern, with the swirl from the propeller surging around him, wallowing in the spumy waves till his arm felt as if being torn from its socket; but all the while with that ugly blaze in his frowning eyes, and with his white face wearing a look no man had ever seen there save those who had gone down under the violence of his wrath.

Stillman had seen him leap and heard him fall, and the veering of the scudding launch told him where he was. Snatching up a boat-hook, the miscreant darted aft, with a snarl on his lips and murder in his eyes.

"Let go, there!" he yelled, with an oath, as he approached. "Let go, or I'll brain you!"

Boyd had expected no less than this, and had managed to draw his revolver from his pocket. He saw the rascal coming, his evil figure looming up against the blue of the sky, and throwing his arm above the surge of the waves around him, Boyd answered his threat with one spiteful crack from his weapon.

The bullet grazed Stillman's ear, yet the nerve of the scoundrel did not forsake him. He sprang nearer the rail, and the boat-hook rose and fell. It missed Boyd's hand by the fraction of an inch, while the curved hook tore a slit in his sleeve and brought blood from a gash in his forearm.

His white face did not change by so much as a shadow—it could not have changed for the worse. His right arm rose again above the froth and spume, however, and the report of his revolver rang across the river.

Stillman reeled back, with a bullet in his shoulder, and the boat-hook slipped from his palsied hand. He appeared dazed for the moment, deaf to the shrieks and yells of warning that were rising from a dozen throats hardly a rod away, the voices of as many men on the barge previously mentioned.

"Keep off! Keep off, you fool, or you'll run us down!"

Boyd heard, but he could see neither the men nor the barge. He knew only that the yells were quickly followed by a crash that shivered the launch to match-wood. As he lost his grip and sank under the terrific shock, he caught one glimpse of Stillman's ghastly face, as he was hurled over the boat's side and into the river.

In no direction, when Boyd rose to the surface, was there any sign of the man. The barge had been carried on, and was fifty yards away. The river was strewn with what was left of the launch, and amid the débris Boyd discovered, floating on the surface, a small leather bag with a loop handle. He took it between his teeth and swam back to the landing.

Less than twenty minutes had passed since his interview with Mrs. Cuthburt, when Felix Boyd again walked into the house and found her in the library, together with most of the persons he had left there. His garments still were dripping. His linen had lost its luster. His left cuff was a smudge of blood and water around his wrist. His face had lost its ugly look, yet it was never more grave and white. Before one of his startled observers could speak, he tossed the leather bag upon the table and curtly remarked:

"There are your wife's bonds, Cuthburt. Hereafter use better judgment in selecting your servants. You'll find your chauffeur at the bottom of the Hudson, if you care to drag for him. I should think it hardly worth while, however. The details of his rascally robbery are of no consequence, now, and the world is the better for his being out of it. Don't you think so, Mrs. Cuthburt, now that I've recovered your bonds?"

The face of the woman wore an expression that Mr. Felix Boyd never forgot.

A Chat With You

IT was Keats, the poet, who called our attention to the fact that the unheard melodies were the sweeter. We have frequently felt in somewhat the same way in regard to stories. The stories that have been written and published are interesting, but there are still more interesting stories which have never even been written. To find the men who can write these stories is one of the tasks to which we have set ourselves. We feel that we have discovered a man with a new story to tell. He has told it for the benefit of the readers of THE POPULAR, and you yourselves shall judge of its interest when you read the November issue.

IT has long been an axiom among publishers that a good detective story will interest almost any one, no matter what his taste in fiction of other sorts may be. Good detective stories are rare, and good, long detective stories with a real plot, with real characters, and with a really sustained and absorbing mystery, are the rarest of all. We have for the coming issue of THE POPULAR what we are convinced is the best mystery novel ever written since Anna Katherine Green wrote "The Leavenworth Case." It is called "The Hemlock Avenue Mystery." It is written by Roman Doubleday, and will appear in THE POPULAR in three parts. We want every one who reads this to pay especial attention to this story. We want all who feel so inclined to write us what they think of it after reading the first of the three parts. There are half a dozen characters in the story. They are all clear-cut and interesting, and, so far as the reader can tell until the very last, any one of them might have committed the crime on which the plot hinges. In this tale there is nothing of the commonplace mystification of the average detective story. "The Hemlock Avenue Mystery" has a real plot, and, what is more, a *new* plot, unlike anything that we have met with in the past. We are anxious to hear what you think of it.

DURING the past two or three months we have received hundreds of letters asking for more stories by William MacLeod Raine, author of "Robbers' Roost." While these letters were being written and received Mr.

Raine has been at work on a new novel which was commissioned by the editor of the magazine before "Robbers' Roost" appeared in print. This novel, which deals with the same country and the same style of life as "Robbers' Roost," is longer and even more fascinating in its incident. It is entitled "Wyoming," and will appear complete in next month's issue of THE POPULAR.

FOR some time we have believed that a large proportion of our readers would be interested in stories of college life. We have been trying to get the right kind. We told you on this page a few months ago that we were making an effort in this direction. At that time the effort had not been successful. We found a great number of college stories, but none of them up to the mark that we had set for ourselves. As a matter of fact a college story with the real atmosphere, spirit, and swing is one of the most difficult things in the world to secure. We finally found what we were looking for, and we now have a series of stories of life in the different American colleges and universities well under way. The first of these, "Pearson, of Princeton," will appear in the November issue of the magazine.

"OUT of the Burning" is a thrilling story of a forest-fire which will appear in the November POPULAR. It is the work of Theodore Roberts, who is a new writer for the majority of you. You will want to hear more from him when you read this story. In the same number is a corking story by Bertrand Sinclair, the author of the complete novel which appears in the present issue, a splendid sea story by T. Jenkins Hains, and a funny story by A. M. Chisholm.

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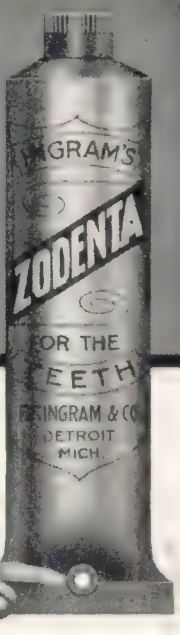

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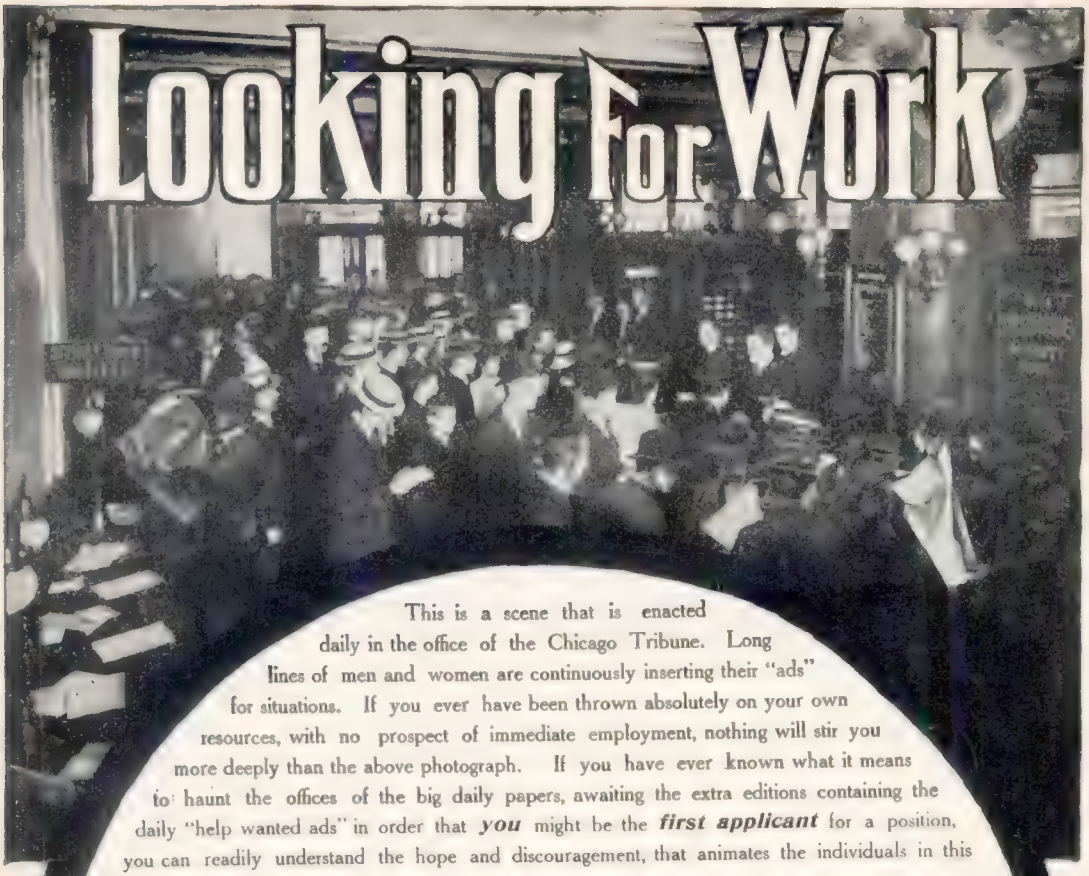

This is a scene that is enacted daily in the office of the Chicago Tribune. Long lines of men and women are continuously inserting their "ads" for situations. If you ever have been thrown absolutely on your own resources, with no prospect of immediate employment, nothing will stir you more deeply than the above photograph. If you have ever known what it means to haunt the offices of the big daily papers, awaiting the extra editions containing the daily "help wanted ads" in order that ***you*** might be the ***first applicant*** for a position, you can readily understand the hope and discouragement, that animates the individuals in this picture.

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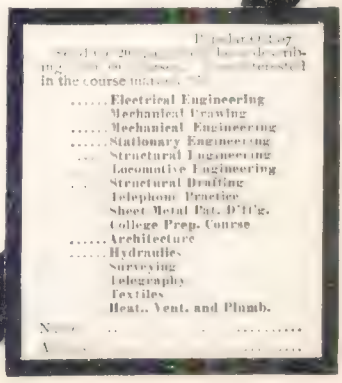
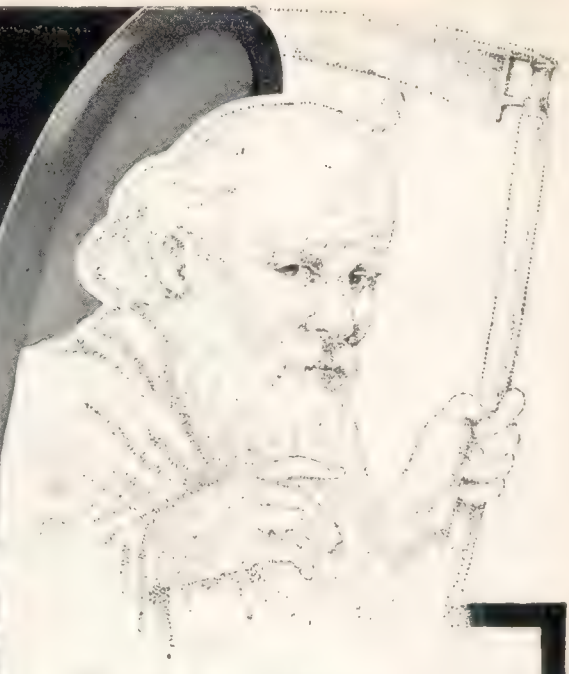


Tell the substitutor: "No, thank you, I want what I asked for. Good-bye."



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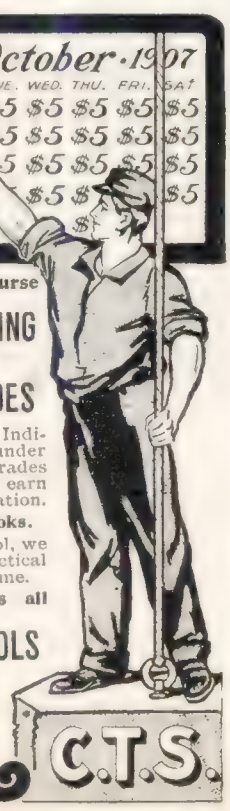

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It only takes you a few minutes once a month to apply Mrs Potter's Walnut-Juice Hair Stain with your comb. Stains only the hair, doesn't rub off, contains no poisonous dyes, sulphur, lead or copper. Has no odor, no sediment, no grease. One bottle of Mrs. Potter's Walnut-Juice Hair Stain should last you a year. Sells for $1.00 per bottle at first class druggists. We guarantee satisfaction. Send your name and address on a slip of paper, with this advertisement, and enclose 25 cents (stamps or coin) and we will mail you, charges prepaid, a trial package, in plain, sealed wrapper, with valuable booklet on Hair. Mrs. Potter's Hygienic Supply Co., 314 Groton Bldg., Cincinnati, Ohio.

EYEGLASSES NOT NECESSARY

Eyesight Can Be Strengthened, and Most Forms of Diseased Eyes Successfully Treated Without Cutting or Drugging.

That the eyes can be strengthened so that eyeglasses can be dispensed with in many cases has been proven beyond a doubt by the testimony of hundreds of people who publicly claim that their eyesight has been restored by that wonderful little instrument called "Actina." "Actina" also relieves Sore and Granulated Lids, Iritis, etc., and removes Cataracts without cutting or drugging. Over seventy-five thousand "Actinas" have been sold; therefore the Actina treatment is not an experiment, but is reliable. The following letters are but samples of hundreds we receive.

Mr. S. M. Walker, corner Carolina and Palmetto Sts., Los Angeles, Calif., writes:—"About two years ago my sight began to fail rapidly. I consulted so-called scientific oculists and had special glasses made, but all to no avail. I bought an Actina and in less than thirty days threw away my glasses. Thanks to Actina I can read or write now for hours every day. I would not be without it for any amount of money."

Rev. Charles Carter, East Springfield, N. Y., writes: "I have made a severe test of 'Actina' by casting aside my glasses and have not had them on except to see what change had been wrought since the treatment began. My eyes gradually gained strength and power and now my glasses are no longer necessary, for I see as well, if not better, without them. I recommend 'Actina' to all my friends."

E. R. Holbrook, Deputy County Clerk, Fairfax, Va., writes:—"'Actina' has cured my eyes so that I can do without glasses. I very seldom have headache now, and can study up to eleven o'clock after a hard day's work at the office."

"Actina" can be used by old and young with perfect safety. Every member of the family can use the one "Actina" for any form of disease of the Eye, Ear, Throat or Head. One will last for years, and is always ready for use. Actina will be sent on trial postpaid.

If you will send your name and address to the Actina Appliance Co., Dept. 96N, 811 Walnut St., Kansas City, Mo., you will receive, absolutely FREE a valuable book —Professor Wilson's Treatise on Disease.

A FAIR OFFER!

to convince

Dyspeptics

and those suffering from

Stomach Troubles

of the efficiency of

Glycozone

I will send a

$1.00 BOTTLE FREE

(ONLY ONE TO A FAMILY)

to any one **NAMING THIS MAGAZINE,** and enclosing 25c. to pay forwarding charges. ***This offer is made to demonstrate the efficiency of this remedy.***

GLYCOZONE

is absolutely harmless.

It cleanses the lining membrane of the stomach and subdues inflammation, thus helping nature to accomplish a cure.

GLYCOZONE cannot fail to help you, and will not harm you in the least.

Indorsed and successfully used by leading physicians for over 15 years.

Sold by leading druggists. None genuine without my signature.

Charles Marchand

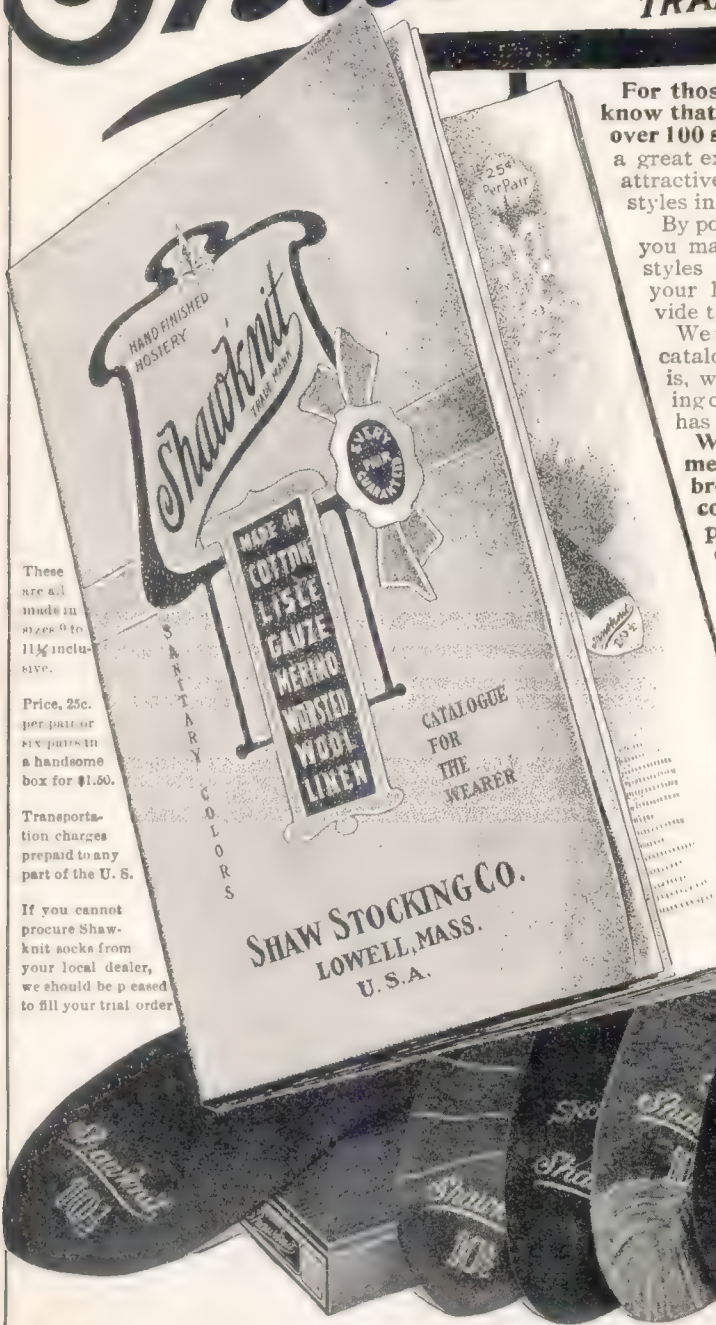
Chemist and Graduate of the "Ecole Centrale des Arts et Manufactures de Paris" (France)

57 Prince Street, New York City

FREE!—Valuable booklet on how to treat diseases.

Shawknit

TRADE MARK



For those of our friends who do not know that Shawknit socks are made in over 100 styles, we have had prepared at a great expense, a most interesting and attractive catalog showing many of our styles in realistic color effects.

By possessing one of these catalogs, you may keep in touch with the latest styles and may order direct, should your local dealer be unable to provide them.

We will gladly send you one of these catalogs, if you will write for it. It is, we think, the handsomest stocking catalog ever issued. No expense has been spared to make it so.

We show below a special assortment of plain colors, stripes, embroideries and White interior cotton socks put up in a neat package consisting of one-half dozen, styles as follows:

Style 388. Rich Navy Blue.
" 1989. Absolutely Fast, SNOW-BLACK.
" D9. Navy Blue Ground with White Hair Line Stripes.
Style 19F20. SNOWBLACK, embroidered with small figures in cardinal silk.
Style 38F10. Rich Navy Blue, embroidered in small figures with white silk.
Style 5P1. Rich, Dark Oxford mixture outside, sanitary pure white inside.

These are all made in sizes 9 to 11½ inclusive.

Price, 25c. per pair or six pairs in a handsome box for $1.50.

Transportation charges prepaid to any part of the U. S.

If you cannot procure Shawknit socks from your local dealer, we should be pleased to fill your trial order

SHAW STOCKING COMPANY, 131 Shaw St., Lowell, Mass.

FEW men know how to wear clothes, and fewer men know how to take care of them. Here's a point that should never be lost—the truly well-dressed man does not borrow distinction from his clothes, but lends it to them. To wear clothes with the right "air," a man should carry himself erect of poise, cultivate an aspect of graceful ease, and keep his chin up, his head back, and his shoulders squared. No matter how fashionably cut and skilfully tailored a suit may be, it will not look well on him who bears himself slouchily, lets his head droop, and shuffles along, instead of stepping out briskly and buoyantly. Everybody can recall this acquaintance or that who does count cost in buying clothes, and who yet, somehow, never looks "fit." He goes to the best tailor, the best haberdasher, the best boot-maker, but no matter how much he spends, his manner of dress is never becoming and distinguished. Either he carries himself gracelessly, or does not bestow upon his clothes the time, thought, and care which they must get to preserve their smartness.

Take a coat fresh from the tailor's. Most men slip it on and leave the front buttons unfastened. This is a serious mistake. All garments require a week or two of wear to drape well and adjust themselves to the curves and peculiarities of the figure. A new coat should be worn buttoned until it fits and sits perfectly; then it may be left open. Never fasten a coat from the top button downward, but begin at the bottom button. Buttoning it from the top creates a strain across the shoulders that makes a garment sag and wrinkle. By starting to button at the bottom the strain is removed. In buttoning a coat, each lapel should be firmly grasped and gently drawn forward. This gives a garment the correct balance, prevents creases, and insures a smooth front. Trifles, say you? Perhaps, but aren't they worth while if they prolong the life, double the good looks, and save innumerable pressings of one's clothes?

English Day Waistcoat.

Not every man can afford "a man" to look after his wardrobe and keep it up to the highest level of efficiency; but every man can be his own "man." It takes less time than you fancy,

New York City Fashions
$12.50 to $25.00

SUIT or OVERCOAT

Made to Your Measure.

STYLE BOOK AND SAMPLES SENT FREE.

And, we Guarantee to Fit you Perfectly or Refund Your Money without any Argument.

—If you only knew how accurately we can fit you and the number of big round dollars we can save you.

—If we could only point out to you in print the difference beween the garments we make to your order (**New York City Styles**) against other styles obtainable elsewhere.

—If we could fully explain the difference in the skill of the **Tailoring**—the difference in the **Dash** of **Style** and **Grace** of the **Fit** and the difference in **Quality** and in Self-Satisfaction too.

You would write at once for our **Handsome Style Book and Samples** of the fabrics from which to select, for "Seeing is Believing."

¶We prepay the Express Charges to any part of the United States, to your home, which means a big saving to you.

Just write a postal today and you will receive by return mail **FREE,** our Style Catalog, Samples and Complete Self-Measurement Outfit.

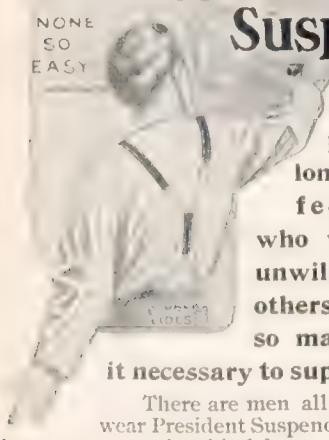
THE NEW YORK TAILORS.

W 729 to 731 Broadway, New York City.

The Largest Mail Order Tailors to Men in the World.

Est. 16 Years. *No Agents.* *No Branches.*

President Suspenders 50¢



President Suspenders live long, fit right, and feel easy. Men who wear them are unwilling to take others. That's why so many stores find it necessary to supply Presidents.

There are men all around you who wear President Suspenders. A good many have worn no other kind for years. They will tell you that Presidents are the easiest and strongest of all suspenders.

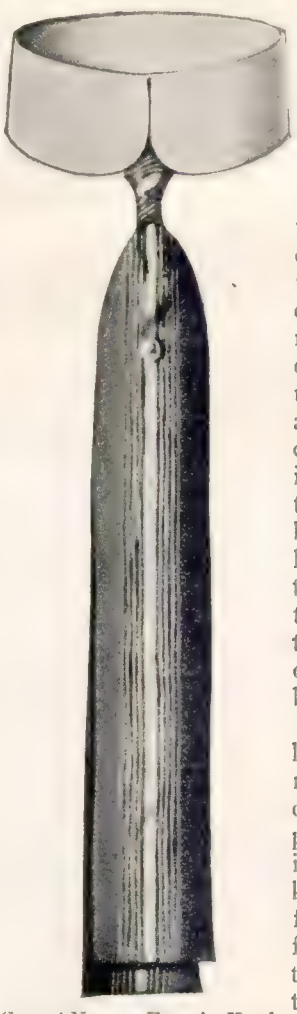
For comfort and long service Presidents will please you immensely. They're delightfully easy. Bend low or reach high and the back slides freely and gracefully—no tugging or pulling.

Light, Medium and Heavy weight. EXTRA LONG for tall men. SPECIAL SIZE for youths and boys.

If you cannot get Presidents at your home stores, we'll supply you at 50 cents a pair postpaid. We will return your money if you are not satisfied after 3 days wear.

THE C. A. EDGARTON MFG. CO., 617 Main Street, Shirley, Mass.

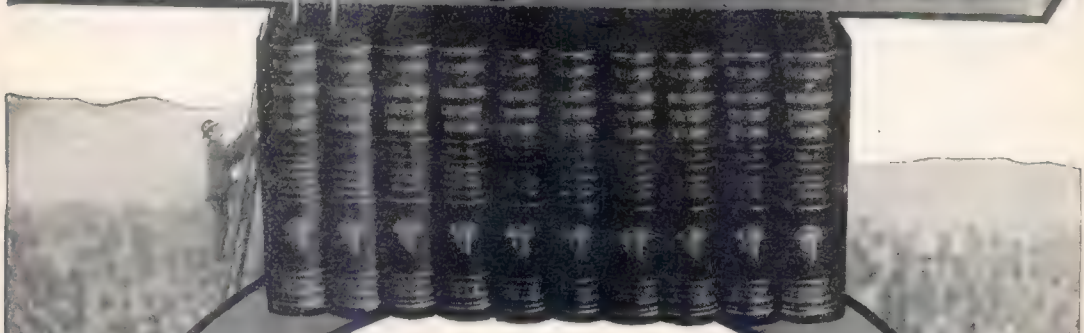
and, after you acquire the habit, it becomes as natural a-mornings as bathing, shaving, or brushing. Some of the work, though, must be done in the evening, and ought to be done the moment you arrive home. The coat should be draped over a wooden or wire form; the trousers folded in their creases and laid in a drawer or suspended from a hanger, and the shoes stretched on "trees." This enables them to shake off overnight the wrinkles and creases that neglect will only accentuate. Tossing a coat over a chair, suspending trousers by the back buckle, and leaving shoes to "toe up," are the surest way to increase dress ills and bills.



Correct Narrow Four-in-Hand.

It is well to have clothes regularly cleaned and pressed, but it is better to keep them as far as possible from needing these ministrations. Steaming and pounding with a heavy iron wear off the "nap" or delicate surface of the finest cloth and cause it to lose its luster. Wrinkles which appear in the sleeves or across the back of a coat can be removed by easy pressing with an ordinary iron. It is not at all necessary to send the coat to a tailor unless it requires complete renovation. If trousers have become shiny at the seat or knees, it is a sign that the "nap" of the fabric has been worn

Climb to your level



It's ambition that distinguishes MAN from the lower animal. MAN'S natural tendency is to ***climb*** to seek ***higher levels.*** If you are not advancing it is your own fault. Here is an opportunity for YOU NOW.

CYCLOPEDIA of ARCHITECTURE, CARPENTRY *and* BUILDING

Ten Massive Volumes each nearly one foot high, handsomely bound in red half morocco. Over 4,000 pages; 3,000 illustrations, full page plates, plans, sections, etc. Printed on highest grade paper; entirely new type—DE LUXE books in every particular.

In order to advertise the ***superior methods of instruction*** of the American School of Correspondence, Chicago, a limited number of sets of this great cyclopedia will be sold at ***one-third regular price.*** It is compiled from representative instruction papers of the School. ***We employ no agents,*** believing our books offer the best method of acquainting the public with the superiority of our ***regular*** courses of instruction. The work ***itself*** is a masterpiece of complete, concise, practical, "ready-to-use" information. There is not one iota of theory in its 4,000 pages. Every demonstration is derived from the ***practical*** experience of the greatest experts in the building industries of the world.

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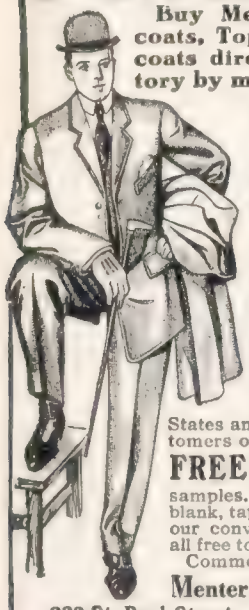
NO MONEY DOWN

MEN'S SUITS ON CREDIT

$1.00 A WEEK

Buy Men's Suits, Overcoats, Topcoats and Raincoats direct from our factory by mail



For $15 & $18

We require no security or reference and we trust any honest person anywhere in the United States.

We send garments on approval—you don't pay a penny 'till you get the clothes and find them satisfactory—then pay $1.00 a week.

We are the pioneers and twice over the largest Credit Clothiers in the world. We operate 73 stores in the principal cities of the United States and have over 500,000 customers on our books.

FREE Send today for our fine line of Fall and Winter samples. Self measurement blank, tape and full particulars of our convenient payment plan—all free to you.

Commercial rating $1,000,000.

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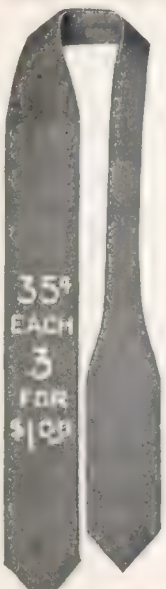
"Shibboleth" Neckwear

Made from the finest quality of

ALL SILK BLACK AND WHITE

Barathea



Woven on

Our Own Looms

and fashioned in

Our Own Shops

into neckwear of quality. Such as is sold by retailers at 50 and 75 cents. Our Price when sold to you direct Postpaid is

35 Cents Each

3 for $1.00

Made in all desirable shapes in black and white only.

The only neckwear in the world sold direct

"From Weaver to Wearer"

SHIBBOLETH SILK CO., 465 Broadway New York

Write for illustrated and descriptive Catalogue B

away, and nothing can be done. The shine may be sponged off, but it will reappear in a day or two.

A capital idea, if one can afford it, is to have two pairs of trousers made to accompany each suit. These can be worn alternately, and, as the chief strain of wear always falls upon the trousers, two pairs can be made to last as long and look as well as the coat. Moreover, with two pairs of trousers, one may have plain bottoms and the other "turn-ups," if one wishes.

Never use a coarse whisk-broom on a derby hat. It scars the fur past repair. Use a brush with soft bristles, and the sort that is curved to fit the inside of the hat-brim is best. When a hat turns green, the felt may be redyed black at trifling cost. Another thing which many men do not know or think of is the fact that the edges of a derby may be rebound, so as to make the hat look as good as new. Hats made of excellent fur and capable of long wear are often discarded, merely because the silk binding at the front or sides has become soiled from fingering or worn to look shabby.

Silk hats are delicate articles, requiring delicate treatment. Stand them on the crown when not in use; don't hang them on a peg. A single, luckless fall is enough to ruin a silk hat irredeemably. To be sure, it should be brushed with a soft brush, never with a whisk-broom, and polished with a velvet pad or cushion. Oily preparations of every sort intended to give the silk hat a high luster are not only worthless, but destructive. Too much ironing is just as bad for a silk hat as too little. Once in six weeks is quite enough. The opera-hat should be kept "sprung" when not in use. Crushing it is prone to cause unsightly wrinkles, which ultimately cause the silk to split. Opera-hats are not harmed by rain-spots. Silk hats are harmed very much.

Beware of steam laundries! They are rack and thumbscrew to good linen. Shirts and collars should be laundered by hand and without the use of chemicals. Soap, water and muscle are the best cleansers and whiteners. It is very bad form to have one's linen finished with a gloss. It should be dull and lusterless.

BEAUNASH.

GEO. S. PARKER LUCKY CURVE FOUNTAIN PEN

Did you ever see some friend take the cap off the pen point end of a fountain pen and then look disgusted, and finally take a piece of paper and wipe off the nozzle? If you have, you may be sure it was not a Parker Lucky Curve Fountain Pen.

"What! Do you mean to say that this common and disagreeable feature is eliminated in the Parker?"

Most certainly we do, for to prevent that trouble the famous Lucky Curve was invented.

"Then why is it every one who uses a fountain pen does not buy a Parker?"

Simply because some people do not take time, the same as you are doing, and inform themselves as to what to buy and what not to buy.

"But will you please tell me how it is the Lucky Curve makes the Parker cleanly while the others soil the fingers?"

Very gladly.

In the common kind of fountain pen, you will find, if you unscrew the nozzle from the barrel, that the feeder is cut off almost even with the thread end. As soon as the pen is returned to the pocket, the heat from the body causes the air inside the barrel to expand. The only way the pressure can be relieved is to force upward the ink column in the capillary channel, where it spills over the edge of the nozzle, under the cap. Proof. Examine any pen not having the Lucky Curve. Unscrew the Parker, and you will find the end of the feeder in the form of a curve—just enough of a curve so that the mouth touches the side of the barrel. By this wonderful little bridging device, gravity and capillary attraction are brought into play, and the feed channel is quickly emptied of ink back **inside** the barrel, thus eliminating the possibility of ink being forced **outside** the nozzle.

This shows the Lucky Curve.

No intelligent person would knowingly run into trouble if he could avoid it; and a safe rule in purchasing a fountain pen and not invite trouble and inky fingers is to unscrew the nozzle and examine the thread end. **See that it has the Lucky Curve.**

If before buying you don't talk to a Parker Pen dealer (of whom there are more than 12,000), or write for instructive and beautifully illustrated catalog, I will think it is because you don't care to have the best. Made either Standard or Self-Filling in many styles.

Parker Pen Co., 64 Mill St., Janesville, Wis. European Branch, Stuttgart, Germany.

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Pay Now & Then

Let us send you Watch or Ring upon terms indicated. Remit first payment with order or have goods shipped for inspection C. O. D. first payment.

Our Attractive Catalog Free. Ask For No. M—83

¼ carat commercial white perfect diamond set in 14-kt. solid gold mounting **$30.00**
$5 cash and $3 per month.

Gents' O. F. 12, 16 or 18 size or ladies' 6 size plain or beautifully engraved 20-year, 14-kt. gold-filled case fitted with genuine new Elgin or Waltham movement **$12.50**

With hunting case, $16.75. $2.00 cash and $1.50 per month.

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Free Offer

of two pairs of hosiery to introduce this famous made-to-measure underwear to those who have not worn it, we will send with first order of two suits or more two pairs of Ladies' or Gentlemen's first quality hose.

Colonial Underwear is **made-to-order for you,** reinforced where the wear comes, not only fits you right but wears longer, is made of better, newer materials and **costs no more** than the ready made article, that is not made to fit you.

Take advantage of this opportunity to get two pairs of highest grade hose **free** with your first order for the **best fitting, longest wearing underwear you have ever worn.**

We make two-piece garments or Union Suits ($2.50 a suit and up) for men and women.

Satisfaction guaranteed or money refunded.

Send for our **catalog now its free.** You can take your own measurements. **This offer is limited.**

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An odorless, antiseptic toilet powder, soft as down, which instantly and surely

Destroys Perspiring Odors

Dusted on the dress shield, the feet or wherever perspiration prevails and gently rubbed with the hand NO-O-DOR gives that delightful after-the-bath feeling, toning the body and causing the pores to perform their natural functions.

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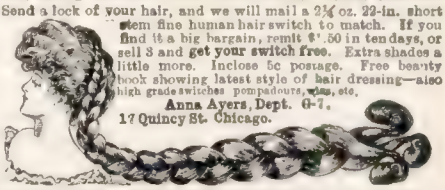
WE WILL TRUST YOU TEN DAYS. HAIR SWITCH

Send a lock of your hair, and we will mail a 2¼ oz. 22-in. short stem fine human hair switch to match. If you find it a big bargain, remit $1.50 in ten days, or sell 3 and **get your switch free.** Extra shades a little more. Inclose 5c postage. Free beauty book showing latest style of hair dressing—also high grade switches pompadours, wigs, etc.



Anna Ayers, Dept. G-7,
17 Quincy St. Chicago.

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Electrozol Massage Cream is made to destroy hair—and does it. Effects only the hair, whitens and beautifies the skin. Nothing to watch but results. Composed of two cerates which applied by massage a few moments cause atrophy of the hair bulb; thus the hair never reappears. Contained in collapsible tubes. Price $2.00; guaranteed. **Sample large enough for any mild case 50 cents.** Money back if unsatisfactory.

ELECTROZOL CO., Dept. 10-O, DETROIT, MICH.

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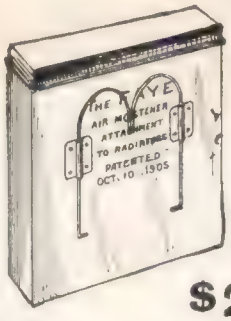
Easy to get at everything without disturbing anything. No fatigue in packing and unpacking. Light, strong, roomy drawers. Holds as much and costs no more than a good box trunk. Hand-riveted; strongest trunk made. In small room serves as chiffonier. C.O.D. with privilege of examination.

2c. stamp for Catalog.

F. A. STALLMAN, 51 E. Spring St., Columbus, O.

Tell the substitutor: "No, thank you, I want what I asked for. Good-bye."

THE FAYE AIR MOISTENER



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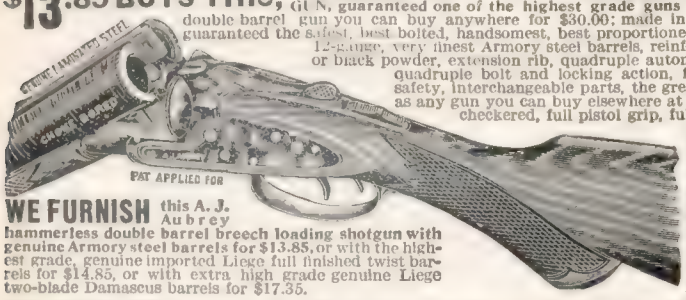

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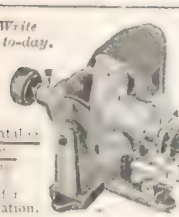

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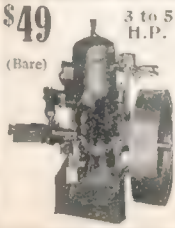

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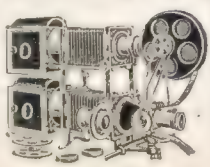

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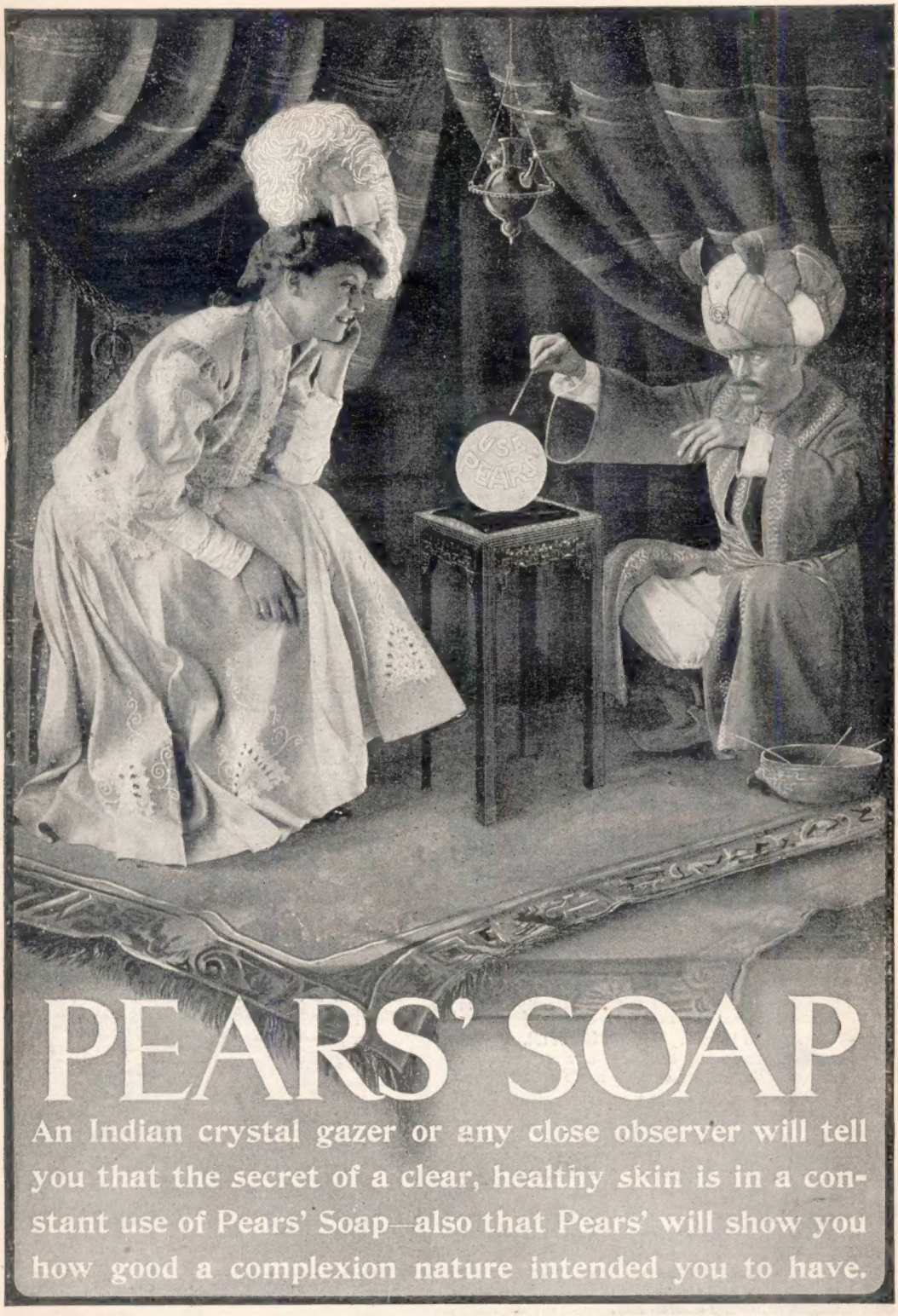

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